



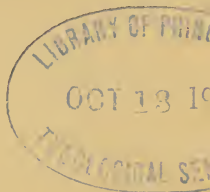


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1886

OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS.



BY ✓

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AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND WORDS OF CHRIST;" "HOURS WITH THE BIBLE;"
ETC., ETC.

WITH SEVENTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS,
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES, AND AN INDEX.

New York:
JAMES POTT & CO.,
ASTOR PLACE.
1886.

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I INTENDED THIS VOLUME TO HAVE BEEN

Dedicated

TO MY DARLING DAUGHTER,

JEANIE,

BUT AS IT HAS PROVED THAT SHE WAS RIGHT,

IN SADLY TELLING ME SHE WOULD NEVER LIVE TO SEE IT,

I NOW, WITH INFINITE SORROW,

DEDICATE IT

TO HER MEMORY.



Forgive, blest shade, the tributary tear,

That mourns thy exit from a world like this;

Forgive the wish that would have kept thee here,

And stayed thy entrance to a world of bliss!



PREFACE.

THIS book may be regarded as a condensed epitome of some prominent portions of the six volumes of "Hours with the Bible," which refer to Old Testament history. Those who wish to study the whole course of God's ways with His ancient people more fully will naturally turn to the larger work. At the same time it is hoped that this volume, which is complete in itself, will be acceptable to many who already have the "Hours," no less than to others who are contented with a glance at the leading points and characters of the Bible story in a single volume.

The numerous illustrations, moreover, will, it is hoped, make it additionally interesting to old and young. Nor can I put aside the pleasant thought that it may be found suited for an attractive Reading Book of Scripture History in the senior classes of our higher educational institutions.

I may add that this book is not a mere abstract of the "Hours with the Bible," but is an entirely independent composition.

January, 1885.



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OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS.

NOAH.

THE date at which Noah lived is differently reckoned in the various chronologies that have been ingeniously compiled from the sacred text. The Rabbis think he was born 1056 years after the creation of Adam; the calculations of the authors of the Greek version of the Old Testament suppose his birth-year to have been 1642 years after that event; while the Samaritan Pentateuch carries it back to the year 707 after that of the first man.

It is clear, therefore, that no certainty can be attained. Indeed, it should be remembered that the very fragmentary notices of the early chapters of Genesis cannot be supposed to give more than a few isolated dates, and leave unknown intervals which did not bear on the sacred narrative, wholly unnoticed. The mountain-peaks and landmarks of primeval history are named, but the broad spaces between remain unmentioned. There is room for an indefinite expansion of the period since Adam's creation.

Things had gone on badly in the earth in these early

ages. Time enough had passed to raise man from the lower to the higher stages of civilization. The pastoral life had perhaps succeeded that of the hunter, and by slow advance had passed to that of settled life in communities. How long it takes for simple tribes to rise to such an artificial culture as to need the arts and luxuries of a city population, with its implied development of intercourse and education, it is easy to conjecture, by recalling the slow advance to such a condition in historic periods.

It is hard to say what the world was like in Noah's lifetime. The only possible clue must be sought in the stage which civilization had attained in the earliest dawn of the post-diluvian nations. But judging from this, Noah must have lived amidst a race enjoying many of the highest results of social and political maturity. In the remotest period of which records in any measure survive, we find Egypt, almost a thousand years before the birth of Abraham, exhibiting a degree of civilization that is inexplicable except on the theory that she had received most of its secrets as a priceless heritage from the world that had perished in the Flood. Gigantic pyramids illustrated the triumphs of architectural science; for their masonry is still unrivalled, their finish still commands admiration, and their proportions and structure reveal a subtle knowledge of geometric and theoretical mathematics. Sculpture and statuary had reached a perfection, whether in wood, or soft alabaster, or the hardest granite, which later ages never surpassed in Egypt. The art of picture-writing had been perfected. The religion of the country was already reduced to a system, and the seasons marked by a regular calendar of festivals. The king's court exhibited all the state and circumstance of well-defined precedence

and forms; the army, the civil service, the hierarchy were minutely organized; and society had already divided and sub-divided itself into distinct grades, from the wealthy lord to the humble workman and slave. The glass-blower, the gold-worker, the potter, the tailor, the baker, the butler, the barber, the waiting-maid, and the nurse, were part of the establishment of each high noble or priest. The acrobat, the dancer, the harper and the singer ministered to the public pleasure, and games of chance and skill were as familiar as they are to-day. If the hut of the poor was wretched, the mansion of the wealthy was sumptuous; and if the slave was well-nigh naked, his lord displayed himself in snowy white, set off by golden collars, bracelets, and anklets.¹ Such refinement is always of slow growth, for it implies the discovery and general introduction of many arts and sciences, and Egyptian tradition appears only to have embodied what must be assumed, when it traced the "wisdom" which distinguished the valley of the Nile, to the race before the Flood.

The Babylonian records, so strangely recovered in our own day, seem to point to the same conclusion respecting the primitive civilization of the region in which mankind had its earliest seat. As early as two thousand years before Christ—that is, in Abraham's day—the adventures of Izdhubar had been composed in an epic of twelve books, each answering to a sign of the zodiac, and to the month named after it. A great collection of sacred hymns had already been compiled, which formed at once the Chaldaean Bible and liturgy. Libraries had been formed in which were treatises on the conjunction of the sun and moon, on the movement of Mars and

¹ Birch's *Egypt from the Monuments*, p. 44. See, also, *passim*, Eber's *Uarda: An Egyptian Romance*.

Venus, and on comets. There have even been found the directions for students, instructing them to write down the number of the book required, that the librarian might presently hand it them. One library was specially rich in mathematical works, and, connected with that at Cuthah, was an observatory, from which the Astronomer Royal was required to send fortnightly reports of his observations to the king, some of which have been recovered.¹

That such many-sided culture should have flourished so early seems to point back to a still more remote civilization, handed down by Noah and the survivors of the ancient world.

But whatever the social and public life of the antediluvian race may have been, it had attained a sad pre-eminence in all that was evil. In the striking language of Scripture, "the earth was filled with violence." Lawless impiety grew continually more daring. Two great families had divided mankind since the Fall,—that of Seth, in whose posterity the knowledge and fear of God had been cherished; and that of Cain, whose descendants had repudiated both. But while the latter had sunk steadily lower, the former had also sadly deteriorated, till at last the two had largely mingled. The light of paradise that had for a time lingered in the sky was gradually fading away.

Even the race of Seth had thus become so tainted with the general corruption that it seemed as if godliness would utterly vanish from the earth. But amidst the almost universal darkness, one faint sparkle of cheering light shone beneath the roof of a son of the fallen race. Lamech still feared the God of Eden. As

¹ *Assyria*, by George Smith, p. 20. *Records of the Past*, vol. i. pp. 155-159.

in every generation since, however, the burden of life lay heavy on this old-world patriarch, so that he was glad, like all of us, to catch comfort from any bright incident in his daily story. Such an one it seemed, when, in what we should think his old age, a son was born to him. "Let us call his name Noah," said he; "this boy will comfort us in our work and the toil of our hands." But the name, which meant "rest," seemed far from carrying a prophecy with it, for instead of quiet, the Deluge was in the background. Yet, if he did not bring rest, Noah was a type and pledge of it in a higher sense than Lamech dreamed; for his Ark has ever since been an emblem of the final redemption of our world from its curse, and he himself became the earnest of a second and greater Saviour, under whom evil was to be banished from the earth, not by a curse, but by the waters of love and pity, above which a new world of holiness should rise.

Of the life of Noah before the awful event in which he played the most prominent part, we know almost nothing. One characteristic feature of it, indeed, is named, but with no details. He spent the long years of warning before the catastrophe that was to destroy mankind, in "preaching righteousness,"¹ in the hope of leading some of his contemporaries to repent.

The form and characteristics of the Ark built by Noah have been the subject of much controversy. It would seem to have been larger than our greatest man-of-war, though somewhat less than the *Great Eastern*; but in the uncertainty respecting the ancient cubit, the exact dimensions cannot, perhaps, be determined. Curiously enough, a Dutchman, at Hoorn,

¹ 2 Peter ii. 5; Heb. xi. 7.

built a vessel, in 1609, on the model of the Ark as described in Genesis, and it was found that the result was a structure capable of holding much more than others differently shaped, though of equal cubical contents.

The range of the Flood was long supposed to have been universal; but the difficulties in the way of such a stupendous miracle, and the uselessness of covering with water vast regions as yet uninhabited; the absence of any traces which could be assigned to a universal deluge, and the evidence in the superficial drift of all countries of repeated great local floods; have led to the more natural and equally satisfactory conclusion that Noah's Deluge affected only a special region. The capacity of the Ark itself, indeed, is a decisive proof that this must have been so, for no one vessel of any conceivable size would afford room for the nine thousand species of quadrupeds, birds, and reptiles, already known; far less contain food for them besides. Nor must it be forgotten that different parts of the world reveal distinct centres of creation which have been undisturbed, even from geological ages, by any violent catastrophe like a universal flood.

The entire ignorance of the extent of the earth, in antiquity, confirms the belief in the Flood having been only local. To the Hebrews, the "whole earth" was a phrase singularly childlike to our better knowledge. Even in the later ages, the ancient Jew fancied the world a great plain, roughened by mountains, with the ocean flowing round it in one great stream. He knew Egypt and Arabia, Asia Minor, the land bordering the south of the Black Sea, and between its eastern end and the Caspian, and the strip along the northern side of the Mediterranean, as far as Spain;—but all else was

a mystery.¹ Asia, Africa, America, and even Europe, in any large sense, did not exist to him.

His use of the phrase "the whole earth" was in keeping with such narrow conceptions. He might either mean the whole world as known to him, or the "whole country," or "district." He called the narrow bounds of the land of Judah, or of the Philistines, "the earth," no less than the wider all-embracing world. There is nothing therefore to hinder our belief that the judgment in which Noah played so prominent a part was limited to a special region.

That such an awful catastrophe as the Flood really happened is strangely corroborated by the universality of the traditions of it among the most widely separated nations. Not only the neighbouring but the most remote races have preserved the story of such a visitation. The Greeks, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Hindoos, the Chinese, and even the American Indians have their legends of such a vast world-destroying calamity.² The awful recollection has burned itself into the memory of universal man.

It is striking that the time assigned for the beginning of the Flood was the season of the year when the fruits of the earth were ripe, and that its close ushered the saved ones to the new earth again, at the time when sowing and planting for the next harvest were required.³

Macaulay has pictured the appalling ruin of the dreadful interval:—

From the heaven streams down amain
For forty days the sheeted rain;

¹ Merx's *Althebraische Weltkarte*.

² Delitzsch, *Kom. über die Genesis*, p. 224

³ Nägelsbach in Herzog, *Art. "NOAH."*

And from her ancient barriers free,
 With a deafening roar, the sea
 Comes foaming up the land.
 Mother, cast thy babe aside :
 Bridegroom, quit thy virgin bride :
 Brother, pass thy brother by :
 'Tis for life, for life ye fly !
 Along the drear horizon raves
 The swift advancing line of waves.
 On, on ; their frothy crests appear
 Each moment nearer, and more near.
 Urge the dromedary's speed.
 Spur to death the reeling steed,
 If, perchance, ye yet may gain
 The mountains that o'erhang the plain.

On that proud mountain's crown
 The few surviving sons and daughters
 Shall see their latest sun go down
 Upon a boundless waste of waters.
 None salutes, and none replies ;
 None heaves a groan, or breathes a prayer ;
 They crouch on earth with tearless eyes,
 And clenched hands, and bristling hair.
 The rain pours on, no star illumines
 The blackness of the roaring sky ;
 And each successive billow booms
 Higher still, and still more high.
 And now, upon the howling blast
 The wreaths of spray come thick and fast ;
 And a great billow by the tempest curled,
 Falls with a thundering crash, and all is o'er :
 And what is left of all this glorious world ?
 A sky without a beam, a sea without a shore.

The simple story of the sending forth the unclean raven which never returned, and then the gentle dove which let Noah put forth his hand and take it in, is graven on all hearts. No less so are the incidents that follow—the sacrifice of thanks to God, and His accept-

ance of it and promise that no such destruction should ever re-visit the world, but that seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night should never cease.

The covenant made with Noah is of striking interest. Ages after, compliance with its requirements was all that was demanded from proselytes of the gate, who could not bring themselves to accept the whole law of Moses. Like the Sabbath, the prohibition of blood is dated from the earliest antiquity. Blood was, in the eyes of the Hebrew, "the life," or even "soul," and as such belonged to God, and must not be used in any way by man. It must either be poured out on the altar as a sacred offering, or otherwise put apart. Man must on no account partake of it. Yet all creatures, with this restriction, were to be his food. They were given to him, as the green herb had been already, to consume at his will. But the shedding of human blood was sternly forbidden, and was to be required even from a beast; a law which continued in force even in the time of Moses, for he, also, enacted that the ox by which a man was gored should be at once put to death. When man was the homicide, stern retribution was to be taken. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man;"¹ and as such, man is sacred and inviolable.

It has been reserved to our day to witness a signal corroboration of the Scripture narrative of the Flood, from the long-buried tablets of Assyria; the very region from which Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race, which was to be the channel and depositary of Revelation, was sent forth by God, to carry out the high destiny assigned him.

¹ Exod. xxi. 28.

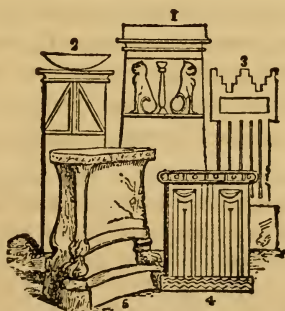
The awful story had imprinted itself with special exactness on the memory of the race which had chosen for its home the very scene of the great visitation. The legend as handed down to us on the Izdhubar tablets, tells of a revelation to a Chaldæan Noah to build an Ark, and "to cause to ascend into it the seed of all life." He was to go into it himself, and to take with him "his grain, his furniture, his goods, his wealth, his women servants, his female slaves, and his young men," and is told that "the beasts of the field will be all gathered and sent to him, and enclosed in his door." Besides his own household, some "sons of the people" were to be saved.

After a time Shamas sent a great rain flood, with thunder. All who were to be saved entered the Ark, and the flood ere long "reached to heaven. The bright earth was turned to a waste." On the seventh day the rains ceased; the Ark was stopped by the mountain of Nizir, and Noah sent forth a dove, which presently returned. Then he sent out a swallow, which also came back, but a raven, sent out next, did not show itself again. As in Scripture, the Chaldæan Noah offered a sacrifice when he left the Ark, and God made a covenant that He would no more destroy the earth with a flood.¹ So minutely do the recovered tablets, four thousand years after they were written, corroborate the Book of Genesis.

The name Hasisadra given to Noah in the Chaldæan story, indicates the estimate formed in those ages of his character. It means, "the reverent," and "attentive." He stands out on the edge of the world's history as a type of patient goodness in the midst of evil; strong in

¹ *Transactions of Soc. of Bib. Archæology*, vol. ii. pp. 213-234; vol. iv. p. 49. *Smith's Babylonia*, pp. 38-48.

faith, when sense and reason might naturally doubt, and honoured supremely for this fidelity. The picture drawn of him in Scripture, and that given of the judgment which he and his household alone survived, is very different from the wild fancies of legend. Even in the Book of Enoch we have extravagances respecting him and it which contrast very strikingly with the calmness of Genesis ; and the stories of the Rabbis are still more fantastic. But in the Sacred Narrative he stands before us with a touching human simplicity, which no false glare of exaggeration seeks for a moment to hide. Before the catastrophe, he shows his natural sympathy for his race by a prophet-like earnestness of persuasion to that "righteousness" which alone could save them, and, after it, we turn to him as the solitary figure in a desolated world, witnessing to his piety in the first moment of his deliverance by the smoke of grateful thank-offering from his rude altar ; to the end, as from the first, a man, in all points, like ourselves.



ANCIENT ALTARS.



ABRAHAM.

AMONG the grand figures that stand out from the background of the remote past, none is more commanding than that of the patriarch Abraham. Other names may have much glory, but the supreme grandeur attaches to his, that it recalls to three great communions of mankind—the Jew, the Mussulman, and the Christian—that from him they have received the common heritage of faith in One Living and Personal God, and that he was so unique in his fidelity to Him, whom he was, thus, the first to honour widely among men, that he was called, by Himself, His Friend.

To reach the age of Abraham, we have to carry ourselves back more than two thousand years before Christ. In that shadowy morning of time he was born in the tents of Terah “the Wanderer,” among the hill pastures and wide plains of the Northern Euphrates.¹

¹ It would appear as if the Bible chronology fixed Abraham’s birth at about sixty years before the death of Noah, and not more than three hundred after the Flood.* But it is to be remembered that throughout Scripture it is the practice to omit many links in genealogies, and to pass in silence over whole generations not specially related to the transmission of the Promise; so that chronology in any strict sense is simply impossible.

The ascertained age of the Egyptian dynasties, dating from

* Kurtz, *Art.* “ABRAHAM,” in Herzog’s *Ency.*

Even in those early days the splendour of the Chaldæan skies by day and by night had filled the minds of the simple children of nature who lived beneath them with a solemn awe which soon passed into worship. Terah himself had fallen into this most ancient form of idolatry before Abraham's birth,¹ but his son rose above it, and clung to the purer faith of Noah. One day, in his boyhood, says tradition, or, rather, poetry, looking round on the earth, and up to the heavens, he began to think who could have created them. Presently the sun rose in his splendour, and he thought it must be the Creator; and he bowed himself before it, and adored it the whole day. But when evening came, it set, and Abraham then thought it could not surely, after all, be the Maker of all things.

But, now, the moon rose in the east, and a countless host of stars appeared. "Verily," cried the boy, "the moon is the Creator of the universe, and the stars are His ministering servants!" and he bowed himself before the moon, and adored it. The moon, however, ere long sank in the west, and the stars grew pale, and the sun showed himself once more on the edge of the horizon. Then said he, "Truly these heavenly bodies can none of them have created this universe: they only obey an unseen Will, to whom they all alike owe their being: Him alone will I henceforth adore, and to Him only will I bow."²

Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham first comes before

about B.C. 3000, * is alone sufficient to prove the existence of a gap in the fragmentary notices of Genesis respecting the ages between Noah and the Patriarch.

¹ Joshua xxiv. 2.

² Beer's *Leben Abraham's*, p. 3.

* Birch's *Ancient Egypt*, p. 23.

us, has been identified, by the inscriptions on bricks, as having stood on the site of the present village of Mugheir, in Lower Babylonia. It was then close to the sea, so that its "ships" are often mentioned, but a wide extent of land, formed at the mouths of the Euphrates and Tigris, now lies between it and the Persian Gulf. Here Abraham lived, and here perhaps he took for wife his half-sister Sarai.¹ She was about ten years younger than he,² and still famous for her beauty long after her marriage.³ Such a relationship was usual then, though at a later date not only forbidden by Moses, but punished with death.⁴ She had no children, but the love he bore her was none the less, and thus the youth and early life of the two passed pleasantly in their bustling sea-port home, amidst their friends.

Ur was the centre of the local idolatry, and boasted of famous temples and gods. The moon especially was worshipped, but there were many humbler deities. To stay permanently in such a community might have imperilled the religious future of the race to spring from Abraham, which was designed by God to be the repository of His revelations to mankind. It is quite possible, besides, that the traditions of the Rabbis, which speak of Abraham suffering persecution for his faith, may have been well founded. To these causes, perhaps, it was owing that Terah resolved to leave Ur, and move off with his sons Abraham—as yet called Abram—and Nahor—for his youngest son Haran, the

¹ There is great difference in the etymologies proposed for this name. They include "The colocynth"—reckoned a graceful plant (Michaelis), and "contentious or quarrelsome" (Ewald). I have given that of Fürst. For her relationship to Abraham see Gen. xx. 12.

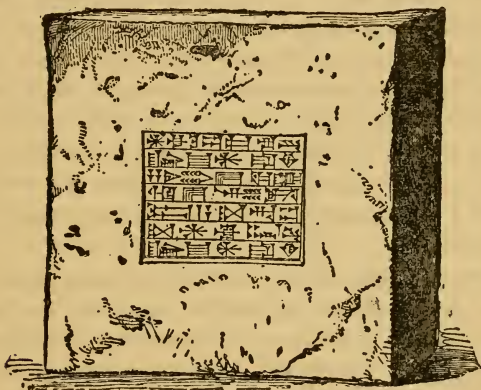
² Gen. xvii. 17.

³ Gen. xii. 14.

⁴ Lev. xviii. 9; xx. 17; Deut. xxvii. 22.

father of Lot, was already dead—to the pasture-lands of Canaan, of which fame had doubtless spread glowing reports, as a green oasis on the west of the great Arabian desert, which stretched from the Euphrates to the hills of Gilead.

Terah, with his dependents and flocks, and Abram and Lot with theirs, therefore, left the south, to seek new lands; Nahor following at a later time. Man proposes, however, but God disposes. Terah, the worshipper



BABYLONIAN BRICK, WITH INSCRIPTION.

of strange gods, was not to found the new race in Canaan, chosen for special favour by God; his idolatry unfitting him for the honour. So he got no farther than the plain of Haran, on the banks of the stream that flowed from the Eastern hills. Here he spent the rest of his life, and here Abram watched by his death-bed.

Legend fills up this period with narratives of fierce trials inflicted on the patriarch by the impious Nimrod, then king of all these regions. He is said to have been

thrown into a dungeon and miraculously fed, and even to have been cast into a fiery furnace, the flames of which suddenly went out, while the wood changed into blossoming, fruit-bearing trees, making a delightful garden, in which angels were seen sitting, with Abram in their midst.¹ In Edessa a spring is still sacred, as that which burst from the earth and quenched the flames.²

But Abram was not to live and die in these remote and sequestered regions. He had been chosen to found a race in which the knowledge of the One God should be handed down to all future ages, and when the time was ripe he was irresistibly led to carry out this Divine purpose. What is meant by "the call" he received, we cannot tell, but, whatever it was, the voice of God was felt summoning him to carry out the earlier but unfulfilled intention of his father, by migrating, at last, to Canaan.

It was the migration, not of a household, but of a tribe, from which, hereafter, were to spring many nations. Moving a short distance to the west and then striking south, along the eastern skirt of the Syrian hills, for the sake of water, he would ere long reach Damascus—the oldest city still inhabited by man. But though it must have seemed to the mass of the tribe, and to those who saw their long-drawn array on the march or in its encampment, only a migration like that of other tribes, the secret impulse in the breast of their leader to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house, to go to a land to be pointed out by God, and

¹ Beer's *Leben Abraham's*, p. 17.

² Edessa was formerly thought by many to have been "Ur of the Chaldees." See Bertheau on the whole subject, *Art. "UR KASDIM,"* in Schenkel's *Lex.*

the animating trust that his obedience to the heavenly "call" would secure the fulfilment of a Divine promise that had been made him, raised it, in its deeper aspect, to something unspeakably greater. For, had not the Lord said unto Abram, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed?"

Separated from the idolatry of his country, and even of his kindred, he was able, henceforth, to preserve in at least one branch of his descendants, the faith in the One God, and he henceforth became, for ever, its representative and first apostle, from whom all mankind received it. The promise was nobly fulfilled even in this.

In the grand fidelity of Abram to this first principle and foundation of all true religion, and in the simple, unhesitating faith with which he acted at once and to the fullest, on every intimation of the Divine Will, lay the supreme distinction which gained him his two unique titles—the "Father of the Faithful," and "The Friend of God."

It is easy for us at this day to accept the belief in One God, but to be the first to maintain it amidst universal idolatry was very different. The worship of the heavenly bodies, and even the servile worship of conquerors and kings, had spread far and wide. Even at this day, after so many ages, the wandering Arab trembles at the name of Nimrod as of that of some awful power, and the sculptures of Egypt still embody the abject terror men then felt before kings, as before

superhuman beings, in the gigantic size assigned to them in comparison to other men.¹ The strength of mind and force of character which could first realize, and then, in the face of a world opposed to it, keep resolutely to the belief in One God alone—distinct from nature, invisible, holy, almighty, and yet the Father of man—claim the truest homage. But this Abram did.

Thus, when all else proved apostate, he showed himself the friend of God by steadfast faithfulness—the Abdiel of his generation. And as he bore himself in this way towards God, he was met, as always is the case, with a return infinitely greater, for he was treated as a friend, accepted and loved. He was “beloved of God,” “chosen” and “called” by Him to be the depositary and transmitter of the Promise to future ages, and it was to him that it was said, “Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” In all points only on the level of our common nature—no demi-god or hero, like the legendary fathers of other nations—he was yet honoured by such relations to the Almighty as no one besides ever enjoyed. It was to him, especially, angels were sent; it was at his tent door that God, in visible form, condescended to stand; and it was to him that an heir was granted when human hope had long ceased.

But while God was thus the Friend of Abraham no less than Abraham was the friend of God, the mere loyalty to the doctrine of the Divine existence was by no means exclusively that by which the patriarch earned this great title. His whole life shows that his faith was no mere

¹ The parts of a statue 100 feet high, of Rameses II., are still to be seen at Tanis-Zoan, in the Delta. It was cut in one piece, and was of highly polished granite. The quarries from which it was brought were at Assouan, far up the Nile.

profession, but the active principle of his being. In the grandest sense he was "the Father of the Faithful." No doubt of God's word ever for a moment occurred to him, even when its fulfilment might have seemed impossible. "By faith," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac—his only-begotten son—from whom his descendants were to spring—accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."¹ Never was the full force of the Hebrew word used more fitly than when it is said that he "believed in Jehovah"—that is, leaned back, as it were, on His assurance, as an all-sufficient stay; rested on it, as a child on the arm of its father who carries it; reposed his soul on it, as an infant lies trustingly in its mother's arms. No wonder that such faith was counted to him for righteousness, for it was the one principle from which all true righteousness must spring. To show itself in outward loyalty of practice was inevitable. "He obeyed the voice of Jehovah, and kept his charge, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws."² He is the type of the religious man of all ages or nations.

The first lengthened halt of the patriarch in his migration seems to have been at Damascus. Legend has made him for a time its king, but this is only in keeping with the exaggeration of later ages. It was there, however, that he bought the slave Eliezer, whom he afterwards raised to be over his affairs. At the head of his armed dependents, and the numerous train of a great Arab tribe, he ere long moved farther south, and first pitched his tent and raised an altar in the Promised Land, under the shadow of the oak or terebinth tree of Moreh, near Shechem, one of the most delightful spots in Palestine. Soon after, we find him moving south to

¹ Chap. xi. 17.

² Genesis xxvi. 5.

Bethel, but only on his way towards Egypt, for a local famine had stricken Canaan, though the bountiful Nile still spread fertility along its own valley.

The Egyptian empire was already old when Abraham led his tribe of simple Asiatics into the midst of its wonders. The pyramids rose before them in their vastness, as before us to-day ; even then monuments of the past. The worship of animals had been introduced. The monarch received personal adoration as the direct and lineal descendant of the gods, and of their substance and flesh. Anatomy and medicine had their literature and their professors. Geometry was applied to mensuration and other arts. Temples of limestone and red granite abounded ; huge obelisks of polished red granite rose on every side, only less wonderful than the pyramids, then cased with polished stone ; and elaborately finished statues and idols of stone, of gold, of silver, of bronze, of ivory, and of ebony, were common. The tombs of the embalmed dead were painted and sculptured with the wondrous minuteness and vividness that still arrests the modern traveller, and a perfected system of picture-writing recorded all public and private life.

In social and political life there was no less to strike the mind of the wandering shepherd chief. The Court of Memphis, which he visited, swarmed with prophets and prophetesses, priests of the gods, and priests attached to the personal worship of the reigning Pharaoh. Public business was under the charge of a carefully organized civil service of scribes, secretaries, and superintendents. The great lords lived in splendour, surrounded by slaves and dependents, and pampered with every luxury at the table, and every refined enjoyment of art.

Whether Abraham, like Moses, borrowed anything

from Egypt is not clear, though it is believed that the rite of circumcision was first adopted from it. None of the charms of even a land so rich and lovely could attract him to fix his dwelling in it permanently, and he preferred the open pastures of the Land of Promise to all it could offer.

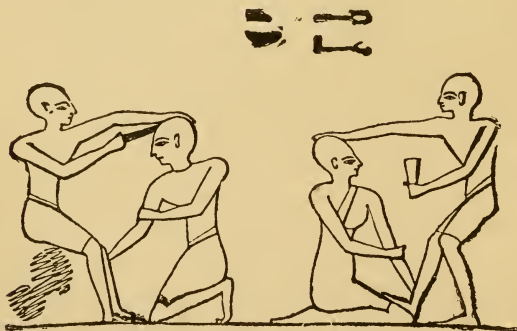
Returning to Bethel, an event took place which decided the character of his whole future, and of that of his race. His own tribe and that of his nephew Lot had hitherto encamped together, but they had now grown too numerous to find pasturage on a single tract. It was necessary, therefore, that they should separate; and Lot, availing himself of the magnanimity of his uncle, which left the choice of a future home to him, selected the plain of the Jordan, in the neighbourhood of Sodom and Gomorrah. Had he chosen the uplands of Judah and Samaria, and left Sodom to Abraham, how different might future history have been! But Providence decided the result—not the mere selfishness of Lot.

The details of after years cannot be fully noticed in a short chapter. At one time we find the patriarch, at the head of three hundred and eighteen of his tribesmen who had been “trained to war,” rescuing Lot from an inroad of hostile tribes from the Euphrates; and that he could muster such a force shows that his encampment must have numbered some thousands, old and young, of the two sexes. It is the only instance of Abraham assuming the character of a warrior. But fidelity to his kindred was not less marked than the upright independence that refused to accept any of the spoil. His intercession for Sodom bespeaks his charity and tenderness; his purchase of the grave at Machpelah, his prudence and justice; and his sending his steward to Haran to get a wife from his own race for his son,

illustrates his resolve to keep his posterity distinct from the idolatrous populations among whom he lived.

It is, however, in his readiness to obey the Divine will, even at the cost of the life of his son, that his character rises to its loftiest grandeur. No other picture of absolute trust in the faithfulness of God was ever so perfect. It is impossible to conceive a loftier ideal of serene, undoubting confidence, that, even in the darkest mystery, the Judge of the whole earth would do right.

Sarah, the faithful wife of his youth, died at his side more than fifty years before he himself followed her. Having laid her in the grave he had bought in Hebron, he henceforth stayed near at hand, to be ready to be laid once more beside her. Over his grave his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, long separated, felt they could once more meet, for by both he was loved and honoured. The wild Bedouin chief, with his fierce attendants, and the peaceful shepherd chief, with his servants, types of different races and of different faiths, found a common attraction in his majestic character and worth.



EGYPTIAN PHYSICIANS AND PATIENTS.



ISAAC.

THE grand figure of Abraham—"The Friend of God"—is followed, in the stately succession of Old Testament worthies, by that of one who, though his son, was, in many respects, a man of a wholly different type. It is well that it should be so in this great picture-gallery of the Saints, if only to cheer all orders of mind or temperament, in turn, by such convincing proofs that men of every class have their fitting sphere in the service and honours of the kingdom of God.

Isaac, the child of long-delayed promise and special miracle, was born when his mother was ninety years old, and his father a hundred—an age, however, which we must measure by the remembrance that Abraham lived till he was a hundred and seventy-five, and that Sarah died when Isaac was thirty-seven.

His birth was the crowning event in the history of his parents, for it was the founding of a great spiritual dynasty which was to inherit all future ages—a dynasty springing, by God's special favour, from themselves. Twenty-four years had passed since the Divine "call" had made them leave their native country beyond the Euphrates, and, ever since, they had been waiting for the heir then promised them. The laughter of incredulity with which Sarah at last greeted the an-

nouncement of his speedy birth, was changed into that of joy. She was no longer Sarai—"The Fruitful One"—a name long a bitter mockery, but Sarah—"The Princess"—mother of future kings and nations!¹ She had obtained the proudest honour of an Eastern woman—she was the mother of a son.

We may trace the growth of Isaac's character in great measure from this exceptional beginning. From the first he was the idol of his mother, and from his earliest recollections he was the only child in his father's tent.



ARAB SHEIKS.

A woman of warm affections and true religious principles, Sarah was, nevertheless, impulsive, jealous, and imperious. Impatient at her childlessness, she had first given her slave Hagar to Abraham, that she might at least have a foster-child, but presently turned against the poor girl, and drove her from the encampment. She had soon relented, however; perhaps at Abraham's instance; but Hagar's child rekindled her jealousy as

¹ Gen. xvii. 15.

soon as her own was born. Ishmael had grown to be a fine boy of fourteen or fifteen, and Abraham's pride in him was as unmistakable as it was natural. Could it be that he would make him, instead of Isaac, his heir; at least, could he love her child as supremely as she wished, while this bright-eyed son of the slave-woman was daily winning more of his heart, by his high spirits and promise of splendid manhood? He must be sent away to some other tribe: she could not suffer his presence. The customary feast at Isaac's weaning supplied pretext enough for a jealous woman. Ishmael, full of boyish mirth, was making merriment, and, very possibly, bearing himself as the elder born, with a boy's airs of superiority to the infant of two years old, whose birth was making so great a stir. It was more than Sarah could bear. Acting on the impulse of the moment, she demanded that Abraham should send away Hagar and her son, now a lad of sixteen or seventeen, and let them join some distant tribe and never return. Nor had Abraham any alternative, but much against his will agreed to do so.¹

Isaac thus grew up from infancy in his mother's tent, an only son, with the natural result of catching a womanly turn of character, for we copy that with which we are most surrounded in early years. He seems, indeed, to

¹ Gen. xxi. 11. The word translated "mocking" is translated "laughed" in xvii. 17; xviii. 12, 15; "to laugh at," xxi. 6; "to mock," xix. 14; "sporting with," "caressing," xxvi. 8; "to mock," xxxix. 14, 17. But as Ishmael was only a boy, his "mocking," even if we take that sense of the word, was not as yet very serious.

Rosenmüller, *Scholia in loc.*, gives "to persecute" as the best meaning; but he is singular in this. Hebrew children were weaned at two years old, or it might be three.—Winer, *Kindheit*.

the end of his mother's life, to have remained very much under the spell of her authority; and the tradition of the Rabbis, that his being "comforted" after her death by taking a wife, points to his having been prevented by her from doing so earlier, that she might have him all to herself, may not be without some grounds.

It was doubtless wisely ordained that his boyhood and youth should be saved the example of one who grew to be so unfit to benefit him as Ishmael. The quiet life of easy prosperity which he always enjoyed, and the pure example ever before him in both his parents, were left to mould him into a gentle, obedient, religious nature, which showed itself to the last in his peaceful, yielding, simple, easy character, made venerable by his integrity and devoutness.

According to Josephus, he had reached his twenty-fifth year when the great trial of his life came on him at Mount Moriah, or Moreh, whichever it was—the future hill of the Temple or the Samaritan Gerizim—in the demand of Abraham, so appallingly startling to a young man, that he should lie down on an altar he had helped to build, and let himself be offered as a human sacrifice. It may be that the "temptation" was sent to Abraham to show that he was willing to do as much for his faith as the idolatrous nations round, who often offered their children to their gods; yet it is certain that human sacrifice and self-immolation were alike condemned by the result. But how grand the trust in the Divine promises, which such a test could not shake; and how sublime the filial obedience and meekness which were ready to yield even life at a father's sad request. Gentle dutifulness could go no further.

Eleven peaceful years passed after this fiery ordeal, which had perfected and crowned the faith of the father,

and moulded for ever the character of the son. Then came the first break in the little circle, when Sarah, ever more tender, and more tenderly loved in return, lay down and died, in a good old age, at Hebron. Abraham was not there when the wife of his youth and of his old age passed away; and, it may be, even Isaac was not at hand to close her eyes; but they came at once, at the sad news, "to weep for her," and sit on the ground in lamentation before the dead. Three years later the grief of Isaac was still keen and fresh, for if there were even a shade of truth in the thought that she had kept her son too much in her pupilage, there is far more in the belief that when he was found alone, in the eventide, in the open country, he had gone out to give free vent in solitude to his sorrow for her loss.¹

In Rebekah, Isaac found, at the age of forty, a mind stronger than his own, to which henceforth he surrendered himself, as he had hitherto done to his parents. He had been passive in the selection of a wife, and he meekly accepted her who had been chosen for him. Her name, "The Enchainer," may have been a fitting tribute to her charms, but it was equally so to the influence she forthwith acquired over her lord. He had been a gentle and dutiful son, and was now to show himself a constant and faithful husband. Even Abraham had had Hagar as well as Sarah, and was hereafter to marry Keturah in his old age, but Isaac had no wife but the one. He had been born in his mother's tent in the poor upland pastures of the Negeb, or southern district of Palestine, and he spent his whole life within

¹ Gen. xxiv. 63. So Fürst: different interpreters translate the word for which "meditate" is used in our version, as "to pray," "to commune with himself," "to take the air," and "to gather together the flocks for the night."

a few miles of his birthplace. On his marriage he led his wife to his father's tents, after Eastern custom, and still lived under his authority. Abraham was now a hundred and forty years old, but survived for thirty-five years more, and in these years married Keturah, apparently one of his female slaves, for she is called only his concubine, or wife of a lower grade.¹ Six sons from this marriage must have clouded the hearts of both Isaac and Rebekah, for twenty years passed without their having a child. At last Esau and Jacob were born when Isaac was sixty, and grew up to be boys of fifteen in the daily presence of their saintly grandfather, "The Friend of God." The sons of Keturah had been sent away to the distant East, beyond the desert, before Abraham died, and thus all that the patriarch had, passed into Isaac's hands when he was gone.²

Forgetting at their father's grave their long estrangement, the two brothers, Ishmael and Isaac, met at his burial, for the only time, so far as we know, after their separation in Isaac's infancy. They came together to lay the honoured dust of their father devoutly beside that of Sarah at Hebron, known even now as El Khalila, "The Friend," in remembrance of Abraham. Isaac soon after moved with his flocks a little way to the south, to the well of Lahai-roi, where Hagar rested on her first dismissal; but the quiet unadventurous life he led may be judged from the fact, that he never seems to have wandered more than twenty-five miles in any direction from his subsequent camping-place at Beer-sheba, the "Well of the Oath," where he was born.

In a life protracted like that of Isaac, periods which now comprise our whole span pass as only acts in a long-continued story. Seventy years glided away from

¹ 1 Chron. i. 32.

² Gen. xxv. 5.

the birth of his two sons before the rupture of the little household by the flight of Jacob to Mesopotamia, after his ignoble deception of both father and brother in the matter of the birthright. Till then, the only troubles that seem to have befallen the prosperous man were disputes with the Philistines respecting wells, so priceless in the dry and hot hill pastures of these parts. Isaac had thriven so greatly as to rouse the jealousy, and perhaps the fears, even of a people so warlike, for he had "become very great," and had "great store of servants." More than a hundred years before, his father had over three hundred fighting men, born in his own tents¹—that is, his household slaves—and since then they must have increased to the numbers of an army. Isaac had, in fact, become a great Sheik or Emir, and might well treat on equal terms with a petty chief. But nothing could ruffle the placid gentleness of the quiet loving man. To dig a well through the limestone rock, often to a great depth, was no small undertaking, but meant, it might be, years of labour; yet, rather than have strife, he yields again and again, and giving up what he might easily have retained, goes farther of, till he is left in peace.

Esau's marriages with the daughters of the idolatrous peoples round were likely a greater trouble to him than the feuds of his neighbours for the watering-places of his flocks. He could put an end to these by sheer gentleness, but there was a dark foreboding in his son's alliances, which must have cast a shadow on his heart. He loved the open, ingenuous, impulsive nature of Esau, and had hoped much from him, as perhaps the heir of the promise, but was now sadly disappointed. Then

¹ Gen. xiv. 14, "trained warriors." See Bertheau, *Gesch. d. Israeliten*, vol. ii. p. 14.

came Jacob's deceit and flight, and Esau's bitter grief at the loss of the blessing, which made even his father "tremble exceedingly," in sympathy with his outraged son. He was already failing, and thought his death near at hand, and this family trouble must have told on him heavily. Yet he lingered on for more than forty years, and for the greater part of them without Rebekah, for she died while her favourite son was an exile. For twenty years, however, before his death, Jacob was once more near him. He was still haunting the long-familiar spots near the graves of his father and mother at Hebron when Jacob returned, and there, at last, at his burial, his two sons for a time forgot their lifelong bitterness, and laid him in peace beside his wife and his honoured father and mother, in the cave at Mamre.

Few have passed a long life as uneventfully. He never knew anything but wealthy ease, and his dependents were numerous enough to protect him in the enjoyment of it to the last. His position brought out no strongly-marked character, but it sufficed to show how a quiet and modest retirement may honour God as much as a life of prominent action. The guileless simplicity which lets Jacob overreach him, because he could not disbelieve a son's assurance; the tenderness which lamented his mother so long, and bade Esau kiss him as he came near; the patient submission with which he bears trial, which none can escape; the grand obedience with which he puts even his life at his father's disposal; the artless purity with which he keeps to Rebekah alone, as his one wife, in an age of polygamy; the majestic strength of his faith in the Divine promises given to his race—a faith which lights up the distant future as he blesses Jacob; and from

first to last, his lowly and unwavering homage to the God of his father, make it easy to understand why even our Lord's authority is vouchsafed for his having passed from earth to heaven at his death. He had failings, no doubt, though only few are told us, but he showed us how we may walk before God, whatever our sphere, and command the respect of our fellow-men, in our life and death, as His faithful servants.



EASTERN WOMAN IN FULL DRESS.



ISHMAEL.

THE unchanging life of the East is nowhere more vividly seen than in the completeness with which the incidents of the patriarchal age are reproduced to-day in the tents of the wandering tribes of the desert—their successors in the simple conditions of society that have always characterized these regions.

Ten years had passed since Abraham's arrival in Palestine. It was then, apparently, open and almost unsettled, except in the few spots on the sea-coast and in the interior, where the Canaanites had begun scattered towns, and in the rich though small "circle" of Jericho, where Sodom and Gomorrah, their chief communities, flourished in the subtropical valley of the lower Jordan. The Divine promise to the patriarch, that his descendants should possess the whole country, had been repeated more than once, and yet he remained childless. He had no human prospect of an heir, except by adopting some child of one of his slaves.¹ It was hard, indeed, to believe even renewed assurances of his having a posterity countless as the stars of heaven; and that he should still have trusted in God's word, under such circumstances, may well have been "counted to him for righteousness."

¹ Gen. xv. 2.

But while he believed that a child would be given him, both he and Sarah, as time rolled on, fancied more and more it must have been meant that it should be so by a second marriage. It was then the custom, as it is still, in similar cases, for a childless wife to give one of her female slaves to her husband, and to adopt as her own a son thus born. There seemed no other way in which the promise could be fulfilled, and Hagar, an Egyptian slave of Sarah, was accordingly given by her to Abraham as his concubine, or wife of an inferior grade.

Like all impulsive natures, however, Sarah soon repented of what she had for a time so zealously promoted. Vain in the prospect of being the mother of an heir to the great Abraham, Hagar, poor simple woman as she was, presently bore herself haughtily to her mistress. From a slave, she saw herself destined to supplant Sarah, and be the great personage of the encampment, in her place. Her head was dizzy, in fact, by her elevation. But she was soon to feel that she had ventured to brave a jealous and imperious woman. By her marriage, she was no longer in Sarah's power, but the offended wife demanded that Abraham himself should punish her for her airs of superiority, and he, in accordance with Eastern customs, was only too glad to hand her back to Sarah again, to "do to her as she pleased." Once more in her power, her jealousy and wounded pride knew no limits to their harshness, till at last the poor girl, "afflicted" beyond endurance, fled into the desert, helpless as she was, to escape from her tormentor, and only returned in obedience to an intimation, conveyed apparently in a dream or vision, that she should do so, and would bear a son, the future father of a countless multitude.¹

¹ Gen. xvi. 10.

The child born under such circumstances must have drunk in, with his earliest lessons from his mother, a bitter hatred of her by whom she had been so cruelly treated. His very name, as he came to understand it,—Ishmael, “God has heard,”—would, in such an age, give him vague aspirations and hopes, and these would be daily strengthened by circumstances. The only child of Abraham, who was now eighty-six years of age, he grew up his father’s pride and delight, and was, doubtless, regarded as the future sheik by all the members of the encampment, and, as such, flattered and caressed by old and young. He was a growing boy of fourteen when all these dreams and expectations were dissipated by the birth of Isaac, who, as the son of Sarah, at once became the young heir, and left Ishmael no position, except what his father’s special bounty might grant him.

Mother and son must have been equally aggrieved by this change in their fortunes, for Hagar had, no doubt, been treated with marked consideration as Ishmael’s mother, so long as there was no other child. Sarah had been powerless to injure either her or her son while she had none of her own, and perhaps had quietly submitted to their taking the place they did, as an unavoidable misfortune. But from the moment of Isaac’s birth all was changed. Her jealousy saw in Ishmael a possible rival to her son, or, at least, a joint heir,¹ and she would brook no partner with him in his father’s affections. Hagar and her son, embittered on this ground as well as by the conscious loss of rank already felt, doubtless fed her aversion by angry resentment and provocations, and the situation would each day become more painful. The feast made at Isaac’s weaning at last brought

¹ Gen. xxi. 10.

matters to a crisis. The taunts and rudeness of Ishmael, now a lad of sixteen or seventeen, were insupportable to Sarah. Presuming on the love so strongly shown him by his father, the son of the slave bore himself as if he were to be heir, and ridiculed Sarah's infant as standing only second. Like a boy, he forgot that a son followed a mother's condition, and that, as Hagar's child, he was only Abraham's slave, while Isaac, as the son of a free mother, was the legitimate heir, however late his birth.

It was a great mistake, and was bitterly avenged. Sarah had once before driven Hagar away by her harsh treatment. She now resolved that both she and her son should be formally sent off, never to return, that the field might be left clear for her own child. It was a sore trial to Abraham, for he loved the boy,¹ but he felt, as he reflected, that Sarah's demand was only the unconscious leading of a higher will. Forthwith, therefore, both were dismissed, to join some other encampment in the desert pastures around. Sarah's hostility made their ejection more than commonly harsh, for, instead of being sent away with gifts of herds and flocks, as the sons of Keturah were, when Sarah was no longer alive, Hagar and Ishmael had nothing given them but a skin of water and some bread.

It was very hard, under any provocation, to cast off a son in such a way, and almost harder to dismiss his mother, though she had been a slave. As it happened, accident made it still harder, for they failed to meet another encampment before their bread and water were spent, and the growing lad, fainting with hunger, exhaustion, and thirst, would have died but for the

¹ Gen. xvii. 18; xxi. 11.

fortunate, or rather specially providential, discovery of a well. Roused to new life, the two, after further weary wanderings, at last reached some friendly tents, and there found a new home. But the remembrance of his mother's ill-treatment, as he must have deemed it, and of his own, had sunk into Ishmael's soul. Indignant at the insult to her, and at his own wrongs, he henceforth cast off all relations with his father's tribe, and became embittered and lawless towards men at large.

The country in which Ishmael found himself was the southern portion of the uplands of the Negeb, now known as the wilderness of Et Tih, but he seems to have finally wandered to a part of the peninsula of Sinai, known then as the wilderness of Paran,¹ separated from Egypt only by a narrow arm of the Red Sea. Whatever he might have been under other circumstances, his expulsion from his father's tents forced him to become a wandering Arab, and the desert reacted to mould his tastes to his new position. The wild freedom of such a life became a passion: necessity forced him to rely on his spear and bow to secure his food by the chase, and to defend himself from man or beast, while a dull sense of wrong made him keep aloof from all, except when he swept down on them for plunder. It must have been a bitter trial to pass from the privileges of Abraham's tent, and the honour and luxury of his wide encampment, to snatch a poor subsistence from the slender resources of the wilderness.

The simple shepherd-life of his father was, however, open to him, and ere long was, in part at least, adopted, for we find the Hazeroth, or circles formed by the tents of an encampment round its flocks, among the charac-

¹ Gen. xxi. 21.

teristics of his family.¹ But his training and disposition unfitted him for the tame and unexciting life of a mere shepherd. In his boyhood and early youth he had been the darling of the great Abraham, and had grown impatient of restraint, and overbearing, from the flattery shown him as the heir-apparent of a desert prince. He could never have dreamed of any other than an easy, dignified life, in which he might enjoy himself without a care as the head of a tribe. High-spirited, and fond of listening, at the watch-fires of his father's herdsmen, to their stories of encounters and feuds with hostile neighbours at the wells, or with the freebooters of the desert, he had early given his whole heart to the excitement of border life on the wild wastes. The chase of the gazelle or the wild-goat, and the more dangerous pursuit of the bear or the leopard, had inured him to exertion and wild adventure, and the tastes of his youth clung to him through life. If he could not gratify them now as the son of a great emir, he would do so as the head of a tribe of his own, and would outrival the bands who had of old so often harried the folds of Abraham. His emblem would be the wild ass² of the desert, which no man can tame, with its home in the pathless wilderness. He would live in wild freedom, afar from the hated communities of those who had banished him from their midst.

Of the future history of Ishmael we know very little. To separate him finally and completely from Abraham and his race, Hagar sought out for him an Egyptian wife; a countrywoman, therefore, of her own. As the

¹ Gen. xxv. 16. "Hazereth" is translated "towns" in our version, but wrongly. Town or rather "toun" is still, however, in Scotland, only a solitary farm-house.

² Gen. xvi. 12, the angel says he will be a "wild-ass man."

son of Abraham he would doubtless be received with consideration by the tribe he joined, and very soon find himself at the head of retainers of his own. Tradition speaks of his having married the daughter of the sheik of his new encampment, and this itself would give him position. The desert on which he roamed was already the home of many bands of nomads,¹ and with some of these he would form alliances.

We have a glimpse of him at the burial of his father. He was now a man of nearly ninety, and had long been a great desert chief. It must have been a striking scene as the two brothers, so strangely separated in life, met in peace, for the moment, at the grave of one whom even the outcast still loved. Isaac with his hundreds of household slaves, and Ishmael with his troops of wild retainers and half-savage allies, in all the state of a Bedouin prince, gathered before the cave of Machpelah, to do honour to the Father of the Faithful, would make a striking subject for the artist.

Twelve sons and a daughter secured the future greatness of Ishmael's descendants. Among these the best known were the Nabathæans, who, four centuries before Christ, made Petra the strange capital of a wide dominion; and the Itureans, who, hereafter, were to dispute with Moses, on the east of the Jordan, for the possession of the Haurân. A strange fate linked the fortunes of Esau, the outcast of Isaac's household, with those of Ishmael, by the marriage of the future father of the Edomites with his daughter. Ishmael was then an old man of a hundred and fourteen; though he lived twenty-three years more. But we hear nothing further of him than that, at last, he died "in the presence of all his brethren," or, rather, as Roseumüller and others

¹ Gen. x. 25-30.

understand it, farther east—that is, away towards Assyria—than any of the races that sprang from the same stock.

The notices of Ishmael in Scripture are remarkable for the singular exactness with which the characteristics of his descendants, the Arab race, are foretold. The words of Genesis, “He will be a wild-ass man; his hand will be against every man and every man’s hand against him,” have been vividly true in every age. The description of them in the fourth century, by Ammianus Marcellinus, is applicable to them still, as it doubtless was in the ages before it was written. “No one of them ever lays hold of a plough, or plants a tree, or seeks food from tilling the soil. They wander continually, roaming through wide tracts, without a home, without fixed dwellings, without laws. Nor do they ever stay long under the same sky, or rest satisfied long with any district. Their life is spent in constant movement.”



COUNTING THE SLAIN BY THEIR CUT-OFF HANDS.—A practice common in Ancient Eastern nations.



JACOB.

IT is well for us that while “man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart.” Tried by superficial tests, mere outward qualities attract the eye, while solid worth is overlooked under an uninviting exterior. The showy tinsel pleases at first glance, more than the dull and clouded gold, but, in time, the one is evidently worthless, while the other grows brighter the more it is worn. The diamond, when first held aloft, in his joy, by the slave who has found it, seems only a common stone, but when cleansed from the stains of the soil, and cut by the skill of the artist, it will shine like the morning star.

To no character in the roll of Scripture worthies does this more strikingly apply than to Jacob. Constitutional bias and the temptations of circumstances developed those more uninviting qualities in his earlier life which raise a natural prejudice that is apt to hide the nobler picture he offered when these morning mists had passed away. That they did then yield to higher principle, commands the admiration with which we regard true worth which has successfully struggled against weakness and temptation. He could have been no common man who began his career as the “Supplanter,”¹ but

¹ “Jacob” comes from the verb Yakab—to catch by the heel; then to trip up, to circumvent, to deceive and outwit.

ended it as "a Prince of God." He could not have wanted commanding qualities, whose name, like that of his father and grandfather, was henceforth so sacred, that no one of his nation in Old Testament times ever assumed it; so sacred indeed, that even now, after well nigh four thousand years, the Jew, wherever found, knows no higher honour than to call himself a "Son of Israel."

The parents of Jacob offered a striking contrast in disposition and characteristics. In Isaac, as we have already seen, we find a quiet, retiring man, indisposed to action or excitement; so simple and pure in his habits, that he and Rebekah have in all ages been the ideal of married life to the Jewish world; a "plain man," like his son Jacob, and contented, like him, to pass his life as a wandering shepherd—the only world for which he cared, the modest encampment of his household and dependents. In Rebekah, on the other hand, with all her conjugal virtues, we see a dash of her brother Laban's meanness of nature and disingenuous finesse, which Jacob only too readily and faithfully reproduced. She is strong-minded and resolute, in contrast to Isaac's almost feminine gentleness, and prone to a duplicity of which his frank unsuspicion was the ready conquest.

The stillness and seclusion of the desert pastures of Southern Palestine, in which his earlier life was spent, were fitted to develop the nobler side of Jacob's nature, but for the presence of untoward influences in the narrow circle of his home. There was only another child in the family—his twin-brother Esau—but their disposition and tastes were wholly opposed, and must have made loving companionship well nigh impossible from the first. As they grew older, unwise partiality in the parents widened the natural distance between the youths.

We often admire in others the qualities which we miss in ourselves—and thus the quiet Isaac delighted specially in the spirited, adventurous Esau; while Rebekah, firm and resolved, turned lovingly to the peaceful Jacob, as if to compensate the want of warmth on the part of his father by so much the more on her own.

In all Arab families supreme importance attaches itself to seniority. The eldest son is the future head of the family or tribe, and inherits a double portion of his father's property. But in the households of the patriarchs, he was, besides, the natural successor in the family priesthood, and, above all, in the inheritance of the mysterious promise of future greatness, first given to Abraham, as the "Called of God." With all her weaknesses, Rebekah shared the simple religious faith of Isaac, with a far keener natural penetration into the best means for its transmission to the future. Esau ostentatiously slighted the higher aspects of his position as the elder-born; had no interest in the family priesthood, and still less in the vague hopes inspired by the heavenly promise. He was the heir, but he was certain to let all that was most precious in the inheritance be lost. It would be safe in the hands of Jacob; for was he not just such a man—quiet, industrious, and thoughtful—as his father? If the direct succession to Isaac was forfeited, with the loss of the birthright, it need not involve any material loss, for Esau could still get what pastoral wealth he otherwise would have had. Jacob valued supremely the advantages his brother despised; and saw in the blessings of elder birth, the religious rather than the worldly benefits, as is evident in the sequel.

As in many an instance since, mother and son, pondering thus, acted on the principle of doing evil that good

might come, and repeated the same crooked course when the blessing of Isaac was needed to secure the advantages already gained from Esau by a cold and heartless bargain. Jacob takes advantage of Esau, when tired and faint, to get from him his birthright for a meal, which natural duty should have offered freely of its own accord. An apt pupil of his mother, he overreaches both his father and brother to gain the blessing, and even stoops to fraud and open lying to effect his end.

But if he sinned, he was sorely punished. If he had expected worldly advantages, he was soon undeceived, for he lost all, and had to flee for his life, and remain a servant, in remote exile, for over twenty years. Still worse, he had to leave his mother, so dear to him, and never see her again.

Yet even in the moment of his flight, the strange mixture of good in the evil of his nature showed itself. We dream of that which has occupied our thoughts when awake ; and Jacob's dream, as he lay the first night on the stony uplands of Central Palestine, amidst wide sheets of bare rock, and slopes strewn with loose stones, was, that he saw the heavens open, and a vast staircase form itself between them and earth, on which angels came and went, while the Divine voice, from the splendours in which the vision melted away above, sounded in his ears, assuring him that he was under the protection of the God of Abraham and Isaac, and would one day return to the land of the promises in peace. What could have turned his sleeping fancies to such channels, but that his waking heart had been filled with worthy thoughts ; he had acted wrongly, and he knew it ; but he had left Esau his father's wealth, for which alone, after all, his brother cared¹ and carried with him only

¹ Genesis xxxvi. 6.

the mysterious hope in the promise of God. He was humbled already, else God would never have revealed Himself to him as He did. The vision he saw was a pledge of the heavenly favour he had prized beyond all things, and a help to his faith in the trials that lay before him.

It must be remembered that the religious ideas of patriarchal times were very simple and imperfect. Jacob laments that, even at Luz, a day's journey from his father's tent, he has left God behind him, and expresses his wonder at the vision, when he wakes, as showing that the Divine Being was here also, though he "knew it not." He had thought of Him only as the God of a special locality—that in which the tents of his father were for the time pitched.

Rebekah had won over Isaac to send him away to Mesopotamia, to repeat, in his own case, the choice made for his father, by Abraham, of a wife from the daughters of the family stock, rather than from the idolatrous maidens of Canaan. The errand was worthy, though only a pretext to cover a necessary flight. But the sequel brought out all that was best in the wanderer's nature. Lonely and poor, he reaches his uncle's country—his staff his only wealth—and meets at the well a cousin, fair and kindly, the first of his kindred he had seen in a strange land. Soft and tender in the remembrance of home, his heart could restrain itself no longer, and he "kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept." Is it any wonder that he loved her henceforth with a deep and beautiful devotion?

Twenty-one years passed away in the service of Laban, now sheik, in succession to his father, Bethuel—a grasping, hard-hearted man, of whom the Rabbis fable that he worshipped, as an "image," the head

of a man—a first-born, whom he had slain. The whole long period is a struggle of selfish cunning and greed on the part of Laban, met by firm resolution, exhaustless patience, and a fertility of crafty resource on that of Jacob. Three times over he pays the service of seven years. To gain Rachel, he willingly toils for fourteen ; and in seven years more he has won a rich possession in flocks and herds. But through all his steadfast purpose to gain his ends, he shows a noble and fixed principle of honest duty that commands our admiration. Under every temptation to play the mere hireling, he could say in the end, that he had borne the loss of that which was torn of beasts ; had made good all that might have been stolen by day or night ; and that he had watched his uncle's flock so faithfully that in the day the heat consumed him, and the frost in the cold nights of the desert, till his sleep had departed from him.

Returning at last to Canaan, the shadow of his past sins still lies upon his conscience. He fears that Esau will avenge his old wrongs on him when they meet. He is a very different man since he crossed the Jordan, but the entrance on the land of promise again overpowers him with emotion. On the east side of the sacred river a mysterious crisis passes in his soul. In the visions of the night he wrestles with One who conceals His name, and vanishes as the day is breaking. In the words of Hosea, "he wept and made supplication, and had power over the angel and prevailed." He cannot let the heavenly visitant go till he leaves his blessing, but agonizes in prayer, humble, contrite, faithful, till the cloud passes, and with the break of morning the light rises in his soul, never again to go down.

Glimpses of the higher and purified nature of the

patriarch show themselves from time to time through his whole life after his first flight from Esau. The fourteen years he serves for Rachel seem only a few days for the love he bears her. His steady principle returns good for evil to Laban, notwithstanding every provocation. At every turn he lifts up his thoughts to the God of his fathers. Rebekah's nurse had come back to him after the death of her mistress, and finds a home with him henceforth, till, at last, he buries her, at her death, with so true a grief, that the oak at Bethel, beneath which he laid her, was long known as the Oak of Weeping. When Rachel died, he raised over her grave at Bethlehem a memorial-stone, still to be seen in the mosque built on the spot; and his affection for Joseph and Benjamin, her children, is one of the most touching passages in the story of his life.

At Bethel, in his early flight, he had no higher ideas of religious things than to make a kind of covenant with God, promising to serve Him on certain conditions. But all was altered when he returned, humbled and purified. His only thought then was that "he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which God had shown unto His servant."

That Jacob's early life shows some sordid, unworthy aspects, is undeniable, but his later life shows the fine gold purified in the refiner's fire. Patient endurance, splendid tenacity; unwavering faith in the unseen; the deliberate preference of a greater future to any inferior present; honest industry; fidelity to his convictions of truth and duty, and lofty homage to the God of his fathers, have made his character an immortal lesson.





LEAH AND RACHEL.

THE charming idyll of Jacob's first meeting with Rachel sheds an abiding tenderness over the narrative of the patriarch's arrival in the country of his fathers. Foot-sore, home-sick, and heavy-hearted; with an uncertain future, in which he must begin life again from the deepest poverty, and with the galling remembrance of the easy comfort and high position of his earlier years, in the tents of a rich sheik like his father Isaac—there was everything to depress him. He had "lifted his feet," as the Hebrew phrases it, for more than five hundred miles, from the uplands of Hebron to the "plain of Syria,"¹ where the rich steppes, from which Abraham had been called away by God, stretch out at the foot of the mountains of Armenia; he had toiled northwards, through Palestine to Damascus; had kept on, under the shadow of the Lebanon range, to Hamath, and had only turned to the east when he reached the wild country where the mountains of Asia Minor trend on into Asia, to form the background of the landscapes he longed to gain—the land of "the sons of the east"—the pastoral tribes of the Syrian desert and of Mesopotamia. Presently, all is changed. He is once more among scenes like those

¹ "Padan Aram" means "the plain of Syria."

he has left; flocks lying round a well, prized there as much as at Beersheba; the shepherds resting idly round, on the pretext that they were waiting till the right hour to water the sheep. They know Laban his uncle, and, still better, tell him that Rachel, his daughter, will be among them presently, with her father's flock, of which she herself was shepherdess, as is still usual with the daughters of the richest emirs. Presently a girl of beautiful figure and as beautiful features,¹ comes slowly before her sheep, over the steppe, and approaches the common centre. Jacob had never seen so fair a vision, and it was that of his cousin, the first of his own blood he had met in a strange, far-away land. New life flushed his veins, for not only relationship, but love, quickened his heart in a moment. The men around might squat in the shade or in the sun; he was instantly at her service. The stone on the well's mouth, which they would not help to push aside till evening had gathered all the flocks, was rolled off by himself alone, and water drawn by him for the maiden's flock, while she still stood by, wondering whom it could be who showed her such courtesy. His task over, Jacob's full heart at last overflowed, and "he kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept," and told her he was her father's nephew and her aunt Rebekah's son. It was quite certain, after such an introduction, that he would receive a hearty welcome, for Laban, with his hard, grasping turn, would not fail to notice that his nephew had not only sentiment, but energy and diligence in his work to recommend him. The others had ended

¹ Gen. xxix. 17. The Septuagint renders it thus. Rosenmüller shows that Rachel's employment is still a usual one with the daughters of sheiks and emirs. See *Shaw's Travels in Barbary*, etc., vol. i. p. 432.

their day's labour while the sun was still high,¹ but *he* had not, like them, waited idle till evening, but had watered the flock, and sent them once more afield, to profit by some additional hours of pasture.

Seven years' service—the price, in Arab fashion, of Rachel's hand—passed over Jacob like a few days; beguiled from weariness, as it was, by the society of his betrothed. Then came the wretched fraud which made him the husband of one for whom he did not care, and wrung from him seven years' labour more for her who was already his by right. It was easy to over-reach him as Laban did, for brides were led into the nuptial chamber veiled, and a husband did not see his wife's face till the day after marriage. The plea was ready that it was not the custom in Haran to wed the younger daughter before the firstborn; an excuse very likely true in fact, though suppressed till then by fraud; for even in the Egypt of to-day a father sometimes hesitates to let a younger daughter marry before her elder sister,² and the rule was still more general in the East in early ages. Jacob had not, however, to wait another seven years for Rachel; it was enough that he promised the service, and thus the same seven days' feast was made to do for a double marriage. He had the two sisters for wives at the end of it, instead of only the younger.³

¹ Gen. xxix. 7.

² Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, vol. i. p. 269.

³ It is not easy to understand whether Jacob had to wait any time for either Leah or Rachel, or whether he got them both at once, and served for them two terms of seven years after the double marriage. Certainly it appears as if he waited seven years before getting Leah instead of Rachel; but against this it is to be remembered that he was only twenty years in all (xxxix. 41) with Laban; and that Dinah, who was Leah's seventh child—born after an interval in which Zilpah, her maid, had had two

Of the two, Leah, the elder, had the disadvantage of plainness. Our version speaks of her as “tender-eyed,” but the Hebrew words mean rather that she was “dull” and “heavy-eyed” in contrast with the bright eyes of Rachel—a great point in Eastern notions of beauty. It may be, indeed, that here, as often, the eyes stand for the whole face,¹ and that the idea intended is, that she was as lean and shrivelled in her looks as Rachel was attractive.² But, as in many other cases, she appears, after all, to have been the better woman of the two. Her position was painful in the extreme, for she was openly slighted by her husband from the first. The names she gives her children tell a long story of patient endurance that might well have touched Jacob’s heart, but for the spell under which her sister held him. Her firstborn she called Reuben—“See (I have borne) a son!”—a dumb appeal to her husband to pity one on whose affliction even God had looked. Still “hated,” she was ere long again a mother, and called her second son Simeon—“Hearing”—because, as she said in her sad simplicity, “the Lord *hath heard* that I was hated, and *hath* therefore given me this son also.” But Jacob stood aloof, and lived, as a rule, only with her sister. Then came a third son, whom her yearning heart called Levi—“Him that joins (us)”—thinking that at last, “this time, my husband will be *joined* to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Yet her womanly hopes were vain. She had been thrust on Jacob by her father, that he might get seven more years’ service from him—and Rachel had his heart from the first. A fourth son could only rouse her to thank God for His goodness, sons—was a marriageable girl when her father arrived in Canaan (xxxiv. 1).

¹ Isa. i. 15; x. 12.

² Jer. iv. 30.

but no longer waked any hope of winning her husband. He was Jehudah—"Blessed be God."

The evils of polygamy had shown themselves vividly enough already, but were now to be aggravated. Rachel had seen, with growing bitterness, her sister's increasing family, and fretted, in her envy, till she roused the passing anger of even her doting husband. The marriage of two sisters at the same time was an evil in itself so great that Moses afterwards forbade it by an express law.¹ Discord and hatred were almost inevitable, and they were still worse in their results between sisters, than if the two had been of different families. But now, each gave a female slave as concubine to Jacob, that they might respectively adopt as their own, in Eastern fashion, the children thus borne. Rachel's maid bears a son whom, in her warmth, her mistress calls Dan—" (God is my) Judge ; " then another, whom Rachel calls Naphtali—" My wrestling "—for she flatters herself that she has prevailed in the " great wrestlings " she has had with her sister, though, after all, to have adopted children was a poor equivalent for Leah's four boys.

But now Leah cannot allow herself to be beaten, and gives Jacob a female slave, as Rachel had done. Her hopes revive when a son is thus born, for she fancies Jacob may be won after all, and so calls the infant, Gad—" My fortune (is coming at last !) " A second son of the slave-girl, however, wakes her hopes no longer, and she simply calls him Asher—" Blessed "—for she feels that women, at least, will call her happy, in having such a family.

The long, wretched struggle that must have worried Jacob's life was not yet over. A fifth son cheered Leah's

¹ Lev. xviii. 18.

heart, and received the name of Issachar—"My reward." A sixth soon followed, and received the name of Zebulon—"Dwelling (with me)"—for she fancied now that Jacob could not refuse to live with one who had borne him six sons. A daughter closed the family of the wronged and slighted woman, but she could only call her Dinah, as a pledge that the Lord had "judged" her cause in her favour.

All this while Rachel had had no child, but at last she bore a son, and could boast that "God had taken away her reproach." But now that she had one, might she not hope for another? She could not help doing so, and spoke her wishes in his name, Joseph—"Whom may God increase."

It was after the birth of Joseph that the third term of seven years' service with Laban began,¹ but it, also, passed away. Besides the miseries of his divided house, Jacob, with all his growth in wealth, had the added troubles of a constant struggle with the greedy duplicity of his father-in-law; but both his wives—the despised Leah, not less than the pampered Rachel—stood by their husband faithfully.

At last, escape was determined, and successfully effected. Wives, children, slaves, flocks, and herds were hurried over the Syrian desert, by seven days of forced marches, to the rich highland district of Gilead, on the east side of the Jordan. There Laban overtook him, furious that his prey had escaped, but pretending, with smooth hypocrisy, the tenderest motives for his pursuit. Unknown to either Jacob or Leah, Rachel had given good ground for her father's anger, for, with a strange mixture of superstition and dishonesty, she had taken advantage of his absence, when she fled, to

¹ Gen. xxx. 25.

steal his household gods, or teraphim.¹ The meanness and falsehood of the family—vices peculiarly Arab—which showed themselves so strikingly in Laban, Rebekah, and Jacob, tainted her also; for she was as ready, with a woman's quickness, to invent a lie to prevent the discovery of her theft, as she had been persistently unworthy in her dealings with her sister.

The arrangements of Jacob for the dreaded meeting with Esau showed how his affections ran. The slave mothers and their children were sent first, then Leah and her family; but Rachel was kept, with Joseph, behind, that if danger threatened, they, at least, might escape. The fierce, lawless deed at Shechem was their next trouble, and made the peaceful Jacob flee to the south, lest the inhabitants might band together and slay them all.

He had determined, while still at Shechem, that on reaching Bethel he would build an altar to God, in remembrance of the vision he had seen there, on his flight from Esau, more than twenty years before. For himself, he recognised no God but "Him whom his father Isaac feared,"² but Rachel had shown, by her theft of her father's teraphim, that she, at least, was given to "strange gods," and both men and women wore ear and nose-rings marked with signs of the heavenly bodies, as amulets, for protection from evil.³ It was unfitting to renew a covenant with God while these were in use, and they were consequently buried under the oak which was by Shechem. The migration southwards was then made, and the whole household consecrated anew to God at Bethel.

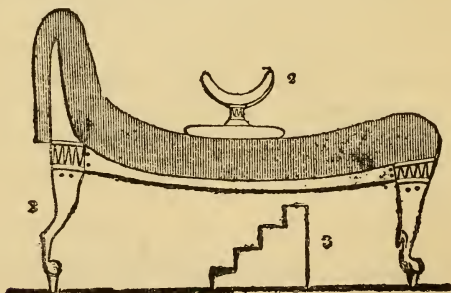
But heavy troubles were near at hand. The stay on

¹ See illustration in *Hours with the Bible*, vol. vi. p. 418.

² Gen. xxxi. 53.

³ Gen. xxxv. 2.

the bleak hills of Bethel saw the first death in the patriarch's circle—that of his mother's old nurse—who had doubtless cared for himself in his infancy. With the pure family affection that has ever marked the Jews, she was buried under an oak at hand, amidst so many tears that it was called the Oak of Weeping. A far sorer trial was, however, near. Rachel's long-delayed wish for another son was to be heard at last, but the mother died as the child was born. "He is Benoni," whispered the dying woman, the "Son of my sorrow:" but Jacob would call him nothing but Benjamin, the "Son of my right hand"—"my good fortune"—"my hope." The light of Jacob's life had gone out. Leah was still with him, and might now be treated more tenderly when her rival was dead, but the image of his first love—the beautiful—the darling—the untimely taken—dwelt in his heart to the last. He could not refrain from repeating the story of how he lost her, even when he lay on his death-bed, in Egypt, forty years after. When Leah died is not told, but while Rachel was buried where she expired, by the roadside near Bethlehem, with a memorial pillar to mark the spot, her sister was reverently laid beside Sarah and Rebekah, in the family burial-cave of Mamre.



EGYPTIAN BED. 1. BED HEAD. 2. NECK-REST. 3. STEPS TO BED.



ESAU.

AMONG the mysteries of life, none is more startling than the vivid contrast often seen between children of the same parents, inheriting the same common blood, and surrounded from the first by the same influences. They are often wholly unlike, either in physical, intellectual, or moral characteristics. Features different from those of either parent, but reproducing the look of a past generation; tastes and capabilities dormant, it may be, in both father and mother, but recognised as marking the family of one or the other; and moral bias for good or evil, no less strangely reappear, after overleaping whole stages of descent, and link the past inexplicably with the present, making us the children of whole lines of ancestry.

It is only thus that we can account for so strange a contrast as that presented by the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. With a dash of the qualities of his mother, Jacob inherited mainly the solid worth of his father—his quiet, meditative turn, averse to action, his contented and simple tastes, his patient tenacity, willing industry, and deep religious convictions. He was the true descendant of Abraham, though tainted by the vices of the old Mesopotamian stock.

Esau, on the other hand, was a genuine son of the desert, or, as our Bible renders it, “a man of the field.”

On his mother's side he was the great-grandson of one from whom no fewer than twelve tribes of the wilderness had sprung.¹ Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, was an idolater, and it was to separate the former from his idolatrous kindred that he had been "called" to cross the Euphrates and seek a new home.

The knowledge of the one living God must, indeed, have survived in Mesopotamia, for we find it retained by descendants of Nahor settled in the Haurân, and brought before us in the Book of Job. But with this exception, and that of the line of Abraham, the idolatry of Terah spread through the wide extent of his posterity as they grew into numerous races, and the wild ungodly blood of the ancient stock appeared again in the veins of Esau.

In those ages, and for many centuries later, a tribe or people living at peace with their neighbours and shunning war was almost unknown. The example of Abraham and Isaac was perhaps unique in their day. To use the expression of Mommsen in reference to all early historical periods, each community had only the choice of being either hammer or anvil: a stranger had *no* rights; his property could be taken as freely as the shell picked up on the shore; he was simply, like the wild creatures of the field, to be hunted down. In Homer's day a man was safe in the possession of his lands and flocks only so long as he was strong enough to defend them. When he lost his vigour, he was in constant danger of being plundered and disinherited. Ulysses, in his earlier wanderings, lands at a city on the coast of Thrace, and instantly sacks it and kills all the inhabitants, not because of any quarrel, but simply from no treaty existing between him and them. Universal

¹ Nahor. See Gen. xxii. 20.

enmity beyond the bounds of single or confederate tribes was the normal condition of society.

Esau, with his wild Arab nature, was in this respect a true child of his age. He has the virtues, but also the defects, of his time and race. The strong, sinewy son of the desert, with its boundless horizons and lawless freedom, his rough and hairy manhood marks splendid physical vigour which urges to excitement and adventure. The old nomadic instincts of his race had come back in him in all their force. Restless, impulsive, and fearless, he delighted to roam the wilderness free as the air or the bird, far from the restraints and tameness of settled habitations. Like a true Arab, he hated the dull pursuits of industry, and turned to his spear and bow as alone worthy a man's regard. Light-hearted as a child, he was as careless of the future. With no self-control or manly thoughtfulness, the enjoyment of the day was more to him than the greatest promises, for the realization of which he must wait. His bounding health and animal spirits engrossed him, and he found his delight only in their gratification.

With all this, he had in him the making of a splendid man, for it must have been long a question whether his restless, unsettled ways were not the mere effervescence of youth; and he showed the elements of a character that would have adorned home had he once sobered into a quiet life. He was free-handed and generous, frank and honest, kindly and forgiving. If he was not devoted to his mother, he could hardly be expected to be so when there was no warmth shown to attract him, but he worshipped his father, who paid him with kind words and looks, and he thought no toil too great to minister to his happiness.¹

¹ Gen. xxv. 28; xxvii. 1.

There was a radical defect, however, in his character, that spoiled all, and left nothing from the promise of the youth, but a disappointing and unfruitful manhood. Life could not be so light and thoughtless as he made it, and ripen to anything worthy. He had no deeper and more sober nature to steady him as he grew older; no settled habits of honest toil; no fixed religious principle; no reverence for the future and unseen, and thus had nothing on which his better nature might fall back when the heyday of animal spirits and mere physical enjoyment were over. Brought up at the feet of Isaac, he might have learned to fear God, and live before Him, from his father's example, even if he noted the blemishes with which religiousness was stained in the persons of his mother and his brother. But he had no seriousness in his nature, and lived only for excitement and pleasure. Indifferent to the godliness of his father's home in his youth and earlier manhood, he passed, in his later years, into the chieftain of a warlike tribe, a stranger at once to the religion and traditions of his forefathers, and the bitter enemy of the "people of God" in later generations.

His last appearance in the Scripture narrative is at the "burial of his father,"¹ where he meets Jacob—the two brothers now about a hundred and twenty years old, and near the end of their lives. Time had changed much. Esau and Jacob were both great shepherd princes, and the land could not bear them together. Jacob had kept faithful to the God of his fathers, but Esau had shown his disregard for the promises by marrying into the idolatrous nations round, careless of the results on his posterity. To the one, religion had come to be all; to the other, it had come to be nothing.

¹ Gen. xxxv. 29.

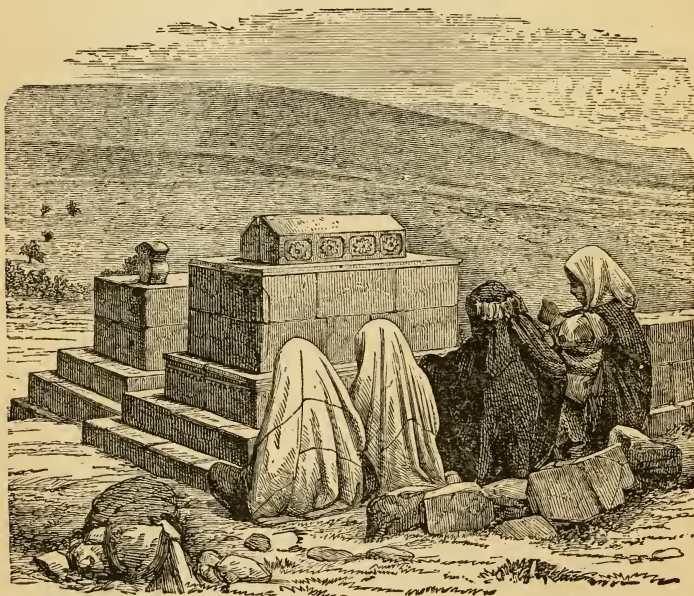
Jacob as a man of peace found himself at home in the open country, for he wished to hurt no one, and to pass his remaining years in the pastoral quiet of all his past. Esau had come to live by his sword, as his father had predicted;¹ the head of a great tribe of lawless nomads; whose hand, like that of Ishmael, was against every man, and turned every man's against him. To him the downs of Southern Palestine were too exposed to attack, and too little suited for defence. The rugged mountains of Edom suited him better. He could live in their fastnesses, and find a retreat among them on his return from his Bedouin forays. To them, therefore, he turned, and made them his home, by the extirpation of their Horite population.

If, as is not to be questioned, a nation remains true to the spirit of its origin, the character of the Edomites, Esau's descendants, throws light on his own. Wayward and fickle, now allied to Israel, now hostile; wavering, unstable; with no high ideal of national or religious life; impulsive, troublesome, restless, they reproduced the image of their ancestor. "A turbulent and unruly race," says Josephus, "always hovering on the verge of revolution, always rejoicing in changes, roused to arms by the slightest motion of flattery, and rushing to battle as if going to a feast." The Idumæan dynasty, which for a time ruled Judæa, bear a stamp no less distinctive: Herod, the magnificent but still half barbarous, devoted to his family, and yet turning against them in his jealousy; the worshipper of Mariamne, and her murderer; Herod Antipas, who heard John gladly, and slew him; and Herod Agrippa, almost a Christian, but also half Jew, half heathen.

The moral of the lives of the two brothers lies on the

¹ Gen. xxvii. 40.

surface. In the elder, we see how the finest disposition, if unsupported by steady habits and fixed religious principle, is no safeguard against moral degeneracy and utter failure in all the nobler purposes of existence. In the younger, the refining and dignifying influence of solid worth, even when it has to struggle against the weaknesses and temptation of a meaner nature, is shown no less clearly. The one shines before us in his youth only to darken and lose his glory ere he dies ; the other rises amidst clouds and mists, but breaks through them after a time, till, at his setting, the very clouds that darkened round him at first heighten his glory as he disappears.



MOURNERS AT A GRAVE.



JUDAH.

THE name of Judah, so famous in the history of the Hebrew nation, seems to have been already in use among the Canaanitish or Phœnician tribes in Palestine, before its adoption by Leah as that of her fourth son. One of Esau's wives—the daughter of Beeri, “The Explainer,” of the race of the Hittites¹—was Judith, a feminine form of Judah, and the fact is of value as showing what the Moabite stone so strangely illustrates, that the patriarchs lived amongst races who spoke Hebrew, as they themselves did. The name does not occur again in Scripture till after the exile, but became frequent after it had been borne by Judas Maccabæus; and it occurs in the New Testament repeatedly, under the forms of Judas or Jude. It has the signal honour of having passed, in modern times, into the word Jew, and to have marked the whole Hebrew nation, even as early as the time of the exile, under the form J'hudi.²

* ¹ Heth means “the dreaded.” The Hittites were a race apparently allied to the Mongols, who formed a great empire stretching from Carchemish, on the Euphrates, to Asia Minor. See *Hours with the Bible*, vol. iv. p. 375. On both the Assyrian and Egyptian monuments they appear as the object of repeated campaigns by the most warlike monarchs of both empires.

² Esther iv. 7.

A longer notice of Judah is given in Scripture than of any other of Jacob's sons, except Joseph; an honour fully warranted by his personal characteristics, and by the historical importance of the tribe which he founded.

He comes before us, for the first time, as a young man of five or six-and-twenty, in the sad incident of the plot against their father's favourite, Joseph. Polygamy had thus early introduced rivalry and ill-will between the descendants of the despised Leah and the favoured Rachel—a rivalry which was by turns to smoulder and burn up fiercely, through all the future history of the nation, till it culminated in the great tribe of Ephraim, the recognised head of the tribes descended from Rachel, finally seceding, with them and with others who followed its leadership, from Judah, the representative of the elder wife. Ephraim vexed Judah, and Judah Ephraim, till the nation well-nigh perished by their mutual, hereditary jealousy.

The sons of Jacob were feeding their father's flocks on the rich plain of Dothan—"The Two Wells"—which is separated only by a swell or two of the hills to the north of it, from the great Plain of Esdraelon, when Joseph approached them in his long-sleeved and, it may be, coloured tunic, reaching to the feet, such as only the better class wore; very different from their own coarse dress. As sons of Leah, they had long hated the elder son of Rachel, thus marked for an easy, luxurious life, as his father's pet, while they were left to toil in the field. The Arab fierceness which had blazed up, some years before, in the massacre at Shechem, was at once re-kindled, and nothing would satisfy them but the murder of their brother, now a lad of fifteen or sixteen. With Eastern fertility in lying, they proposed to kill him and cast him into some empty well, pretending to

Jacob that some wild beast had devoured him. Fortunately Reuben, the first-born of Leah, was in a gentler mood, and induced them to content themselves with stripping him of his finery, and putting him down a dry cistern to die of hunger and thirst; a fate from which he intended to rescue him secretly. Unfortunately his kindly design was unknown to Judah, who thought only of the wretched death thus waiting the lad, and was glad to suggest a more merciful fate for their victim, on the appearance of an Arab caravan, passing from beyond the Jordan to Egypt. "What good," he asked, "will it do us to kill our brother, and hide the murder? Let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, and not let our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." Hard at the best, it was well intended, and showed a kindly heart, though, for once, a less fertile readiness than that of Reuben. In two generations "Ishmael" had avenged his expulsion from the tents of Abraham by leading off Isaac's grandson to foreign slavery!

The scene of intense and long-continued dissimulation that followed marks a wretched morality. Neither Reuben nor Judah had the manliness to tell their father the truth, and thus enable him to take measures for his son's recovery, but, with their brothers, let him believe the lie of the coat dipped in blood, and, with audacious hypocrisy, "rose up to comfort him" for his terrible loss. The ideal of uprightness and religious honour was but poorly developed, as yet, even in the circle of the chosen race!

It was impossible for each generation to imitate Jacob by going to Mesopotamia to marry into the family stock; and, indeed, the results in his case had not been very encouraging. Hence, when, during a visit to the

Canaanite town of Adullam, in the hills a little south-east of the future Jerusalem, Judah saw, at the house of one of the town's-folk, a Canaanite maiden, Shuah—"The Heiress"—who pleased him, he made her his wife. Her name seems to imply that he shrewdly bettered his fortune by the match, and this appears also to follow from a notice we presently have of his having begun an independent career as sheep-master, at Timnath, on the western slopes of the hills behind Joppa, a long way from his father.

Yet every lot in life has its shadows, and those in that of Judah were the deaths in his family. Two married sons and a daughter died, leaving him only his youngest son.

The strange episode of his daughter-in-law Tamar throws a strong light at once on the singular marriage-laws of these early times—which, with some restrictions, were afterwards adopted by Moses—and on the imperfect morals then prevailing. We must not forget, indeed, that the scene is in Canaan, the hot-bed of all impurity from the days of Sodom to those of later Rome.

Two children of Tamar—"The Palm-Tree"—a tall graceful maiden, doubtless, at her marriage—claimed Judah as father, and one of them, Pharez, was destined to be the ancestor of the royal line of David, and, in the end, of a far higher than he, our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Strange that the Holy One should have in His veins the blood of the harlot Rahab and of the illegitimate Pharez; but so it stands recorded, as if to show that not even the guiltiest are beneath His pitying regard!

Our scanty notices pass over about twenty years, and bring Judah before us again as a man close on fifty, pleading with Jacob to trust him with Benjamin on the

¹ 1 Chron. ii. 3-5; Matt. i. 2, 3; Luke iii. 33.

second journey to Egypt for wheat, in a time of sore famine in Canaan. The high official who had given it to the ten brethren before, had told them that they should not see his face if their youngest brother were not with them. But that brother was the only son left of Rachel, the wife of Jacob's early and only love, and how could the poor old man part with him? The brothers try to induce him to do so, but in vain, till Judah interposes, offering to become surety for the lad, and to bear the blame for ever if he do not bring him safely back again. His influence with his father obtained what all his brethren had for weeks striven, without success, to win from him.

The further scene, in which, after the pretended theft of Joseph's cup, all the brothers, with Benjamin, were brought back and treated as criminals, brings Judah before us as the foremost man among them. Nowhere can there be found an appeal of more striking natural eloquence than that in which he pleads to be taken as a slave instead of Benjamin, that the loss of the second son of his father's best loved wife might not bring down the old man's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.¹

When Jacob had finally determined to remove with all his family to Egypt, the influence of Judah, as the foremost among his sons, was again seen by his being sent beforehand to meet Joseph, at "the city of Heroes" (Heroöpolis), or, in "the land of Rameses," as the Septuagint renders it, and receive instructions from him respecting the district assigned to his family. Heroöpolis was at the edge of the home in the Delta, thus set apart for the new immigrants, and the mission of Judah to Joseph to prepare for their arrival shows that he must have been regarded by Jacob as every way deserving

¹ Gen. xliii. 18-34.

his confidence. He had shown himself trustworthy, intelligent, and energetic in his management of the difficult affair of Benjamin's detention, and the same characteristics doubtless gave him his prominence in the family on a great occasion like their removal to another country.

The blessing of the dying patriarch is the last glimpse we have of the ablest of Leah's sons. It opens with one of the plays on words so common in similar cases in Scripture—

Thou art Jehudah—(Praise)—thy brethren shall praise thee !
 Thy hand shall grasp the necks of thy foes !
 Thy father's sons will do thee homage !
 A Lion's Whelp is Judah—
 (Like a lion) Gone up from the prey art thou, my son ;¹
 He lays himself down, and settles himself as an old lion or
 a (fierce) lioness (in her den) ;
 Who shall rouse him ?
 From Judah shall the Sceptre not depart,
 Nor a leader be wanting from his loins,
 Till He comes, the Prince of Peace ;
 To Him will the nations be subject !

He (Judah) binds his ass's colt to the **vine** ;
 To the royal vine his ass's foal !
 He washes his garments in wine ;
 His clothes in the blood of the grape !
 His eyes shall glow with the fire of **wine** ;
 His teeth be white with milk !

When and where Judah died is not told, but the position assigned him in his father's circle was retained

¹ Luther makes it, "Thou art grown great, my son, through mighty victories." Nothing can be harder than to reconcile the opposed renderings of such passages as the blessing of Jacob. I have simply tried to make the best version I could out of many, and from the Hebrew itself.

by his descendants towards those from the other sons of Jacob. At Sinai, the tribe of Judah was larger than any other, and the place of honour was assigned it in the wilderness, in the van of the host. In keeping with the figure of the paternal blessing, the traditional standard of the tribe was a lion's whelp, with the legend, added in later times, "Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered"—the battle-cry, strange to say, of Cromwell's decisive charge at Dunbar.

After the stormy anarchy of the Judges—a period not unlike that of our Heptarchy, or even of earlier and still more turbulent times—Judah and Ephraim became ever more prominently the leading tribes. Under David and Solomon, the former for a time reigned over the whole race; but the next king saw the fatal secession of Jeroboam.

After the return, Judah remained the one representative of the ancient greatness of collective Israel. It included, doubtless, many of other tribes—the gleanings won from the Captivity; but, even now, over the whole earth, the fourth son of Leah has a universal tribute to his influence in the past, for the word Jew, as I have said, is but a repetition of his name.



BEARDS. UPPER ROW, EGYPTIAN; OTHERS, OF VARIOUS NATIONS.—*After Wilkinson, Rosellini, and Layard.*



JOSEPH.

IN the difficulties and anxieties of life, it has always been felt by those who believe in a gracious Providence, that they should not despair, even when things look darkest, since the greatest trials may be found, in the end, to have been divinely overruled for good. To such a consolatory trust, apart from individual experience, nothing has aided more powerfully than the story of Joseph. Torn from a doting father to pass into slavery in a foreign land; one moment filled with dreams of useful happiness and future honour; the next, beseeching his own brothers, in anguish of soul, not to kill him or sell him as a slave,¹ he yet lived to be able to say to those who thus cruelly wronged him, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God—to save your lives by a great deliverance, and to preserve you a posterity in the earth."²

At the time of the flight from Mesopotamia, Joseph was about six years old; as yet the only son of his father's favourite wife, born when Jacob was over ninety, and thus endeared, not only as the first child of Rachel, but as the child of his old age.³ Years only added to this fondness, for, as they passed, they showed in the growing boy a quiet thoughtfulness that contrasted

¹ Gen. xlii. 21.

² Gen. xlv. 7.

³ Gen. xxxvii. 3.

strongly with the rough ways of his brothers; a strictness and purity of mind to which they were strangers; and an instinctive sense of his future ascendancy, which, doubtless, seemed to his father only a foreshadowing of what he himself equally believed and desired. The simple, peaceful Jacob, averse to stirring or lawless excitement, loved Joseph so much the more as he saw in him the counterpart of his own nature. Unfortunately he could not conceal his partiality. His darling must have everything that marked his being so, even to a long gay tunic, the special mark of superiority and honour!

The dry cistern at Dothan, and the fetters of the slave-caravan, were the fierce retaliation for the weakness of the father and the airs and vanity of the lad. Then followed the slave-market, and his purchase by Potiphar as a household servant. It was a rough discipline for a boy of seventeen, but like all the trials of life when rightly used, it was, after all, the first step towards great ends.

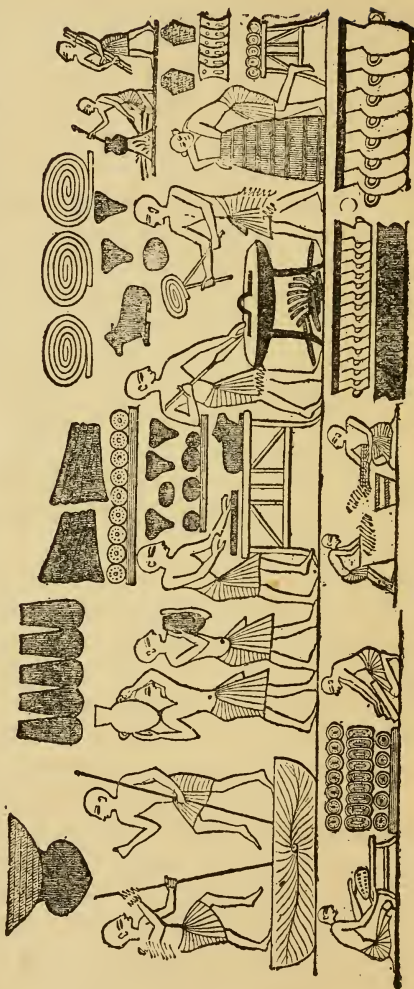
Brought up in pastoral luxury as a favourite son of a great emir, and showing it in his whole style and bearing; personally beautiful;¹ staid and sober beyond his years; sagacious, able, and upright; it was natural that he should inspire confidence, and equally so that the confidence reposed in him should be justified. From a menial he presently rises to be head of Potiphar's house, entrusted with the management of his master's domestic affairs. But it is seldom granted that prosperity should escape checks and reverses, often severe and undeserved; and Joseph had his full share of them.

The sorest temptation that can befall any one—to sin and prosper rather than resist and suffer—finds him victorious, but with a dungeon as the penalty. The

¹ Gen. xxxix. 6.

strong sense of the presence of God which characterises him through life,¹ sustains him in his unmerited calamity, as it had strengthened him to the virtue for which he was thus punished. He commits himself to "Him whom his father feared;" and, with surpassing strength of mind and firmness of religious principle, believes it better to do right at any present cost, than to prosper for the moment by doing wrong.

His past life had turned on the significance attached to dreams, and they were the determining influences in his future career. In these early ages, —and, it may be,



EGYPTIAN BAKERS AND COOKS.

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9; xli. 16; etc.

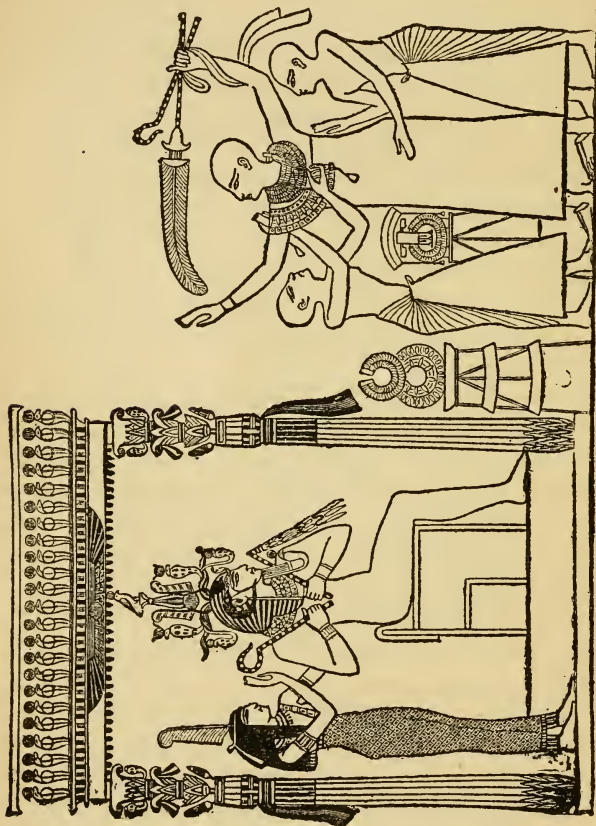
even now, more than we suspect,—dreams were often the channel of direct or symbolic Divine communications. Advanced in the prison to the same honour shown him in the house of Potiphar, two dreams of high officials imprisoned with him, were the occasion, after a time, of his being brought under the notice of the King himself. It had been a long trial, but the light was now to break at last. Thirteen years had passed between the sad day of his sale to the Ishmaelites at Dothan and his being led away in the slave-coffle, and his standing before Pharaoh in honour and dignity; and of these nearly all had been spent in the degradation and suffering of an Egyptian prison. That he kept firmly to his trust in God, amidst universal idolatry, under such a trial of his faith, marks his true worth and greatness of soul.

The interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and the counsel he based on it were well fitted to secure his elevation. Who could be better fitted to carry out a project than he who had conceived it? The sagacity which proposed a plan so evidently wise could alone be trusted with its execution. As often happens in the East, the slave of to-day became the dignitary of the morrow.

The account of Joseph's installation as Grand Vizier is true in its minutest details to ancient Egyptian life, as shown in the contemporary pictorial records still so fully preserved. The investiture took place in presence of the great King, seated on his throne, and the monuments still illustrate¹ how "Pharaoh took off his signet ring,—the Great Seal of the kingdom,—and put it on Joseph's hand (as the sign of his being appointed prime minister, to act in his master's stead), and arrayed him in (long, flowing) vestures of fine (Egyptian) linen, and

¹ Wilkinson's *Ancient Egyptians*, vol. i. p. 293.

put a gold chain round his neck, (the visible badge of office).” Public inauguration followed. Seated on the State Chariot, known as that which immediately followed



INVESTURE OF AN EGYPTIAN DIGNITARY WITH HIGH OFFICE.

(He stands before the King, and is being adorned with gold collars and other signs of special honour and high rank.)

the chariot of the King in grand processions, the new minister was borne through the city and shown to the people, heralds going before, with the cry to all to

“prostrate” themselves as the representative of the monarch drew near.

Egypt was then the centre of civilization, and the greatest existing monarchy. The Pyramids of Cheops, Chephren, and Mykerinus, on which we now gaze with wonder, were already nearly a thousand years old. So were the great subterranean mummy pits round them, which now give us so vivid a picture, in their countless mural paintings, of the life and customs of these ancient times. A thousand years had yet to pass before the history of other nations begins. The gigantic monuments of Upper Egypt which still amaze us had stood for centuries. Thebes was in all its glory. The huge Tombs of the Kings had been hewn out of its rocks, and its colossi threw their shadows over the sands. The Lake Moeris had been constructed, as a vast reservoir of the Nile waters for the fertilization of the land, and canals netted the country for its universal irrigation.¹ An invasion of “Shepherd Kings” from the plains of Asia—the first inroad on civilization by the hordes of that continent—had overthrown the twelfth native dynasty, and, after reigning more than five hundred years, had been at last expelled by King Sethos the First, or a near predecessor. Under this great king, Joseph, shepherd’s son as he was, and, as such, of a hated stock, found himself prime minister.

Of the policy of Joseph, there have been very opposite opinions. To us it seems that with all his uprightness, he must have been a man of hard, stern nature, kind enough to individuals and to his family, but insensible to the claims of his fellow-men as a whole. By levying heavy taxes of wheat during the plentiful years, he amassed in the royal magazines a stock which put

¹ See *Records of the Past*, passim.

the country at the mercy of Pharaoh during the terrible famine that succeeded. Till then the people had owned the soil, but, step by step, he got from them, first, all their money, then all their cattle, their horses, flocks, herds, and asses, then all their lands, and finally their personal liberty,¹ and removed them from the soil that had once been theirs, to cities—a nation of slaves, owned, with all that belonged to them, including even the country itself, by the crown. Henceforth he rented their lands to them, after the famine, for a payment of twenty per cent. of the produce, a tax heavy enough to be oppressive, but yet light compared with the system of the present ruler of Egypt, who exacts such burdens that forty thousand inhabitants in one district alone have recently been forced to quit their holdings and let them lie untilled. Still, to take advantage of the necessities of a people, to make them and their very country the personal property of the king, was far from the ideal of generous statesmanship.

Joseph, strangely enough, had been made Zaaphnaath-paaneah²—"Governor of the district of the abode of him who lives," that is, of the god Ankh. This district was to be the future home of his family. Driven by the famine, Jacob's sons had to come to Egypt for food, like many from other lands. Joseph had also been made Ab-en-Pirao—"The first officer of the palace of Pharaoh"—not "father of Pharaoh" as our version translates it; and it was only natural that his brothers should not recognise him, surrounded by the splendour of such exalted posts. That he should treat them roughly, even after so many years, and notwithstanding the good fortune which their crime had brought him, was only human, and it was well, besides, to humble them and

¹ Gen. xlvii. 15-21.

² Gen. xli. 45.

force them to feel their guilt. But why did he inflict on his father the terrible trial of demanding Benjamin, or keep him in ignorance of his own existence and welfare? It gave the old patriarch months of agony, for through months together he refused to consent to Benjamin's leaving him. Why, indeed, had the favourite son not sent word to his father long years before, that he was alive and prosperous?

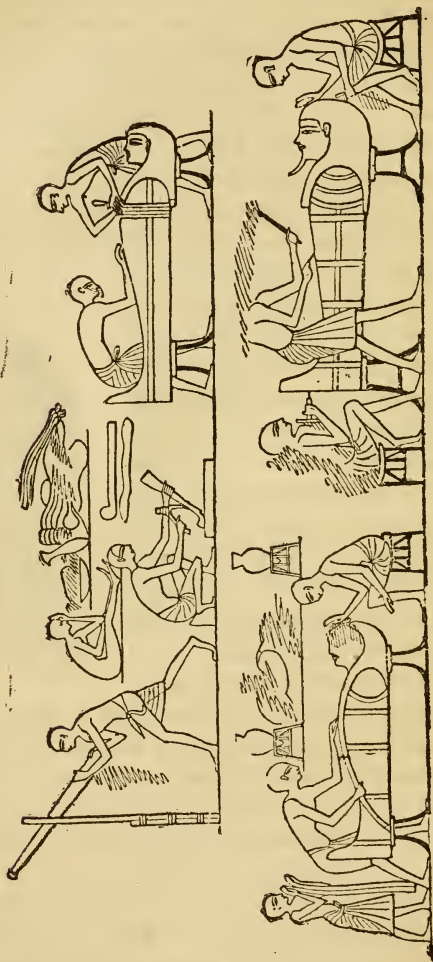
But, once resolved to make himself known, his conduct was noble and generous. The district of Goshen, running south from Pelusium on the edge of the Mediterranean, and eastward to the southern desert of Judæa, had for its capital, On, whose greatest temple was dedicated to the god Ankh—"He who lives." Joseph had been married to the daughter of its high priest, and likely lived in the city. The district round, he persuaded Pharaoh to assign to his family. It lay north of Egypt proper, and was probably then, as now, a poor region, fitted for grazing, but not so fertile as to make its being given up to strangers a public offence. Besides, it made these strangers a bulwark to Egypt on its only vulnerable point, towards Asia, and, at the same time, both kept them apart from the Egyptians, and brought them in contact with the purest conception of the divinity to be found in the land.

That they prospered as they did shows the tenderness with which they were cared for, and it is certain that they retained this interest in Joseph's regard to the last. In speech, dress, and manners an Egyptian, he remained



EGYPTIAN PRIESTESS.

at heart a Hebrew. The first of many examples among



EMBALMING OF THE DEAD.—After Wilkinson.

his race,—including even the late premier of England,

—of a Hebrew rising to the highest place in the country he had made his home, he was still true to his kindred and to their faith. For his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, he preferred Jacob's blessing, and a portion with his descendants, above all the honours he could have secured for them from Pharaoh. For himself, he cherished the promise of a return to Canaan as, beyond doubt, to be realized, and exacted a pledge, carried out generations after, that his embalmed mummy should be buried in the sacred land, whither he had already carried that of his father.

The circumstances of his death are not told us, but the lesson of his life may be read by all. It teaches a calm reliance on Providence in all the changes of life, and the grandeur of unshaken faith in the goodness of God. The value of strict integrity, energy, and industry, are no less enforced, nor can young men, in some aspects, have a nobler example.

Joseph appears to us as a man of great natural parts, able to form and adhere to plans involving the transformation of a country in its constitution and laws. He could endure patiently, and he kept to his principles steadfastly from youth to old age. Instinct with energy, of inflexible will, ambitious from youth, but using despotic power gently, when gained; able to restrain his feelings and preserve self-command, but not without deep affection and kindly sympathy; ready to forgive injuries, and even to benefit those who wronged him most,—he is, still, greatest in his fidelity through life to the God of his fathers. Pure in morals, a tender father, a generous brother, he was much more,—a confessor of the true faith in the midst of idolaters, and a believer in the promises when their fulfilment was centuries distant.



PHARAOH.

“**P**HARAOH” is not a name, but a title, which, strange to say, anticipated, in the early history of the world, the Turkish and Persian custom of using the residence of the monarch as his official style. As the Sultan is “the Sublime Porte”—or “lofty gate”—so the Egyptian king was Pharaoh, “the great” or “the high house.” Even in the Book of Esther¹ the “king’s gate” is used as equivalent to the palace, and it was an easy step from this to use it of himself. In Scotland, country gentlemen are known, not by their own name, but by that of their estate.²

Egyptian chronology is one of the most hotly-disputed questions of the day, and it is vain to attempt the reconciliation of the different theories. Taking that of Professor Lepsius, one of the most learned men of Germany, as guide, we may, perhaps, be as safe as with any.

It would seem that the king under whom Joseph was advanced was no other than Sethos I., or Sesostris, a point in which Lepsius, Mr. Stuart Poole of the British Museum, and Dr. Brugsch are agreed. Eighteen dy-

¹ Esther iv. 2, 6.

² This custom is alluded to in the preface of Kinglake’s *Eöthen*.

nasties had risen, flourished, and passed away before he appeared, and the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, had held the land for over five hundred years. They were now, at last, driven out, and Sesostris was left free to carry out his ambitious plans as a great conqueror. Passing through Palestine, he waged a successful war with the Hittite nations of Southern Syria, capturing their chief city, north of the chain of Lebanon, and afterwards blazoning his victories in a vast series of bas-reliefs, which still adorn the northern wall of the great hall of Karnac, which he had caused to be built. The glory of the Pharaohs cannot be better realized than from these wondrous memorials, in which the triumphant monarch is drawn of gigantic size, lording it over all other men as a being more than mortal. Was it the wealth which the policy of Joseph poured into his treasury, to which his military enterprises, or his splendid architectural works, were due? With a nation universally degraded to slavery to the crown, despotism had all the resources of the land at its command. Certain it is that, from this date, an era of foreign war and conquest began, which carried the arms of Egypt from the Nile to the Tigris, and founded a vast empire which lasted about three hundred years.

While armies thus marched and countermarched, the descendants of Jacob were peacefully multiplying in the district assigned to them in the Lower Delta. In spite of the exclusiveness of the Egyptians, to whom foreigners were almost as hateful as they afterwards were to the Jews themselves, the successive generations of the patriarch fathers gradually mingled more and more with the people, and learned to copy no small part of their religion. The golden calf of after days may have been a reproduction of one of the sacred bulls—

most likely the bull Apis; though on the other hand it may have been copied from the idolatry of the Euphrates Valley. The gods Remphan and Chiun, whose shrines were carried by the tribes through their wilderness journeys,¹ were idols adopted from the Babylonian Pantheon; but the almost ineradicable tendency of the Hebrews to heathenism makes it probable that, in the end, they would have been mingled and lost in the general population around them on the Nile, but for the religious reaction induced by violent oppression, and ending in the Exodus.

The Egyptians were a race standing midway between the Caucasian and the Negro, and largely intermixed with Arab blood. Very religious in their own way, but given to degrading superstition, they were marked by many virtues and by perhaps still greater vices. Hospitable, respectful to women, and generally frugal, they were nevertheless sensual, untruthful, treacherous, and cringing. The fond recollections of Egypt by the Hebrews, after the sense of oppression had passed away, seems to imply kindly treatment at the hands of the people, as distinct from the government, and this appears to be further implied in the fact that an Egyptian could be naturalized as a Jew in the third generation.²

The religion of the country was a strange contrast of the pure and lofty in theory and the degraded and foul in practice. The immortality of the soul, the belief in futuré rewards and punishments, and, consequently, of man's responsibility, were held along with the fetish worship, common to all tribes of even partially Nigritian origin. Animals, trees, rivers, and hills were worshipped, and special mummy-pits preserved the bodies of sacred cats, monkeys, oxen, birds, and crocodiles.

¹ Amos v. 26; Acts vii. 43.

² Deut. xxiii. 7, 8.

Traces of the primeval religion were, indeed, retained in the very conception of a god like Ankh—"Him who lives"; but the devotion of the multitude was paid to objects so contemptible, that even the heathen Greek and Roman of later days made it the subject of ridicule.



RAMESSES II.—Lepsius.

The long reign of Rameses II., under whom Moses was born, saw the Israelite colony steadily increasing, but as steadily losing all that was best in their national character. It was the grandest period in Egyptian history. Like Sesostris, Rameses was a great warrior, and like him he led his army against the Hittites, who

then formed a powerful kingdom, and may have been connected with the hated shepherd-tribes, who had so long held Egypt under their power. But if he only imitated his predecessors in his military exploits, he far outshone them in the grandeur and beauty of his temples in Egypt and Nubia. Joseph had long been dead, and the friendly feeling at court towards his race had gradually changed to one of alarm at the increase of a people so warlike, and so rigidly distinct from the rest of the nation, though within its borders. The fears of conquest by pastoral tribes so like the Hyksos, rose to a deep-seated alarm on the part of the king, and measures were taken to break their spirit, and, at the same time, to protect the land against any attempts at revolution. The Egyptian monuments, and especially the papyrus rolls, are filled with incidents which refer to the building of a new city—Pi-Rameses, “the town of Rameses”—in the neighbourhood of the Jewish district—a city of temples dedicated especially to the king himself, who required religious worship to be paid him. Allusions still abound to the stone and brick work with which, to finish their task quickly, the workmen were overburdened, and details so precise and special are given, that it is impossible not to recognise in them the most evident connection with the Bible account of the hard servitude of the Hebrews, on the occasion of building new structures required at Pithom—“the town of the God Tūm,” or Ankh—and Pi-Rameses.¹

It was in the town of Pi-Rameses, or Zoan-Tanis—founded originally “seven years before (the) Hebron” of Abraham,² but strengthened and beautified by Rameses II. at the cost of the enslaved Hebrews—that most of the events of the stay in Egypt and of the Exodus

¹ Exod. i. 11.

² Num. xiii. 22

happened. A sandy plain, at the present day sad as it is vast, still recalls, by its name San, the remembrance of the sojourn and sufferings of Jacob's descendants. It is covered with gigantic ruins of columns, pillars, and obelisks, statues,¹ sphinxes, tablets, and building stones, all cut in the hardest granite of Syene—brought down the long course of the Nile, nearly six hundred miles, to the nearest landing, and dragged thence by human strength to their present position. So grand and imposing was the city of the "plain of Zoan," where God "wrought his signs and wonders."²

It was this town that Rameses II., in the fifth year of his reign, entered as a conqueror, after having gained his victories over the Hittites of Upper Palestine, and where he concluded a treaty of peace and alliance with them six years later. On the plain around, his cavalry and troops held their reviews, and here Rameses preferred to reside, issuing from its palaces his orders to the officers of the court, and receiving foreign ambassadors in his spacious saloons. It was the port of this town, crowded with Egyptian and Phœnician vessels, that gathered to itself the commerce between Syria and Egypt. Here the children of Israel endured their long and cruel slavery, of which the huge ruins, scattered around, are the memorials. Here Moses performed his miracles, and from this point it was that the thousands whom he hastily gathered for flight began their exodus from Egypt.

Rameses II., better known as Miamun, was one of the greatest of the Egyptian kings, and raised his country to the highest glory it ever attained. Herodotus

¹ Among others, the remains of a great statue of Rameses II., 100 feet high, have been lately discovered.

² Psalm lxxviii. 43.

and Diodorus relate many things of him which help us to realize the position of Israel under his rule. He sailed with his fleet and army from the Red Sea, along the coasts of the Arabian Sea, and made great conquests. On his return to Egypt he set forth by land, subduing all the nations that came in his way, till at length he crossed from Asia to Europe, and conquered the Thracians and Scythians. He next carried his army into the western parts of Africa, and added them to his empire. Before starting on this enterprise, he divided Egypt into thirty-six nomes or provinces, appointing a governor over each. His forces are said to have numbered 600,000 foot, 24,000 horse, and 27,000 war chariots, and his fleet on the Red Sea was of 400 sail. In the Hebrew district in the Lower Delta he built a great wall, on the eastern border, to protect the country, a work of which the Bible retains a record in the name Shur,¹ which means "a wall," and in "Etham,"² the Hebrew rendering of the Egyptian word "Khetam," the fortress by which the "wall" was protected on the north. In the construction of all these great works Rameses employed the innumerable captives taken in his wars, and oppressed the children of Israel till their lives "were bitter with bondage in clay and bricks, and in all kind of work in the field, and work of every sort besides." "They built for Pharaoh,

¹ The translation of the word "Shur" in the passages where it occurs seems often preferable to the retention of the Hebrew. Thus Hagar was found "by the fountain on the way to *The Wall*," her anxiety being to get to Egypt, her own country (Gen. xvi. 7); Abraham "dwelled between Kadesh and *The Wall*" (Gen. xx. 1); Ishmael's descendants "dwelt from Havilah to *The Wall* that is *before* (east of) Egypt" (Gen. xxv. 18). Other passages might be added.

² Exod. xiii. 20; Num. xxxiii. 6-8.

also, store-cities," says the Scripture; "Pithom and Rameses."¹

But amidst this splendour and oppression, a child of the dreaded race had been born, and was even then being trained in the very palace of Rameses, who was destined to shake the power of the Egyptian throne; to rouse the Hebrews to a new zeal for the long-neglected religion of their fathers; and to raise them from slaves to a free nation, chosen of God as the future depositaries of His revelations to mankind.

¹ Exod. i. 11-14 (from the Hebrew).



WORSHIPPER OF THE SUN.—*Birch.*



PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER.

THE proverbs of every nation have a local or historical colouring. The deliverance of Isaac from death originated the saying, "In the mount of Jehovah it will be seen,"—which is equivalent to our form, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." In the same way it became a Jewish proverb, which is still in use, "When the tale¹ of bricks is doubled, then comes Moses."

No prospect could have been darker for any people than that of the Israelites in the reign of Rameses II. Though some doubtless enjoyed comparative advantages by being engaged in the higher industries, it was still only as slaves. Bezaleel, "(The man) under the shadow (or protection) of God," and Aholiab, "The Tent of his father," the one of the tribe of Judah, the other of that of Dan, must have been only representatives of many, trained like them, in Egyptian factories, "to work in gold, and silver, and brass; in cutting and setting stones, in carving timber, in weaving and embroidering all descriptions of texture, and, generally, in all manner of workmanship."² But the mass of the nation were field labourers, liable to be impressed

¹ From the Anglo-Saxon *Talean*, "to reckon, to tell."

² Exod. xxxi. 4 ff.

for the heavy toil of great public works. Human life, under such a despotism, was of no value, and Rameses, doubtless, was only an earlier type of Egyptian rulers like Mehemet Ali, who, in excavating the Mahmoudieh canal, compelled 150,000 miserable fellahs to dig it out without wages, and even without spades. Their hands were their only tools. That 30,000 died of exhaustion under their "task masters" was of no account against the fact that the whole excavation was completed in a single year.¹

To secure the weakening of the dreaded Hebrews, Rameses had issued a temporary edict, commanding the destruction of the male infants of Jewish mothers. Just then one of them bore a son, whose beauty the fond legends of later times described as so great that all who saw it stood to look at him, and labourers left their work to steal a glance. The mass of the Israelites had forgotten the religion of their patriarchal forefathers, and had turned to the idolatry of the Egyptians,² but the parents of the wondrous infant bore in their names—Amram, "Kindred of the Lofty One,"³ and Jochebed, "(She) whose glory is Jehovah," the witness to their fidelity to the God of their fathers. In "Jochebed," indeed, so far as is known, was the first incorporation of the sacred word "Jehovah" with a Hebrew name.

What to do with the child was hard to tell, but faith in God forbade compliance with the command of Pharaoh, to put him to death.⁴ For three months the

¹ Stephen's *Incidents*, vol. i. p. 22.

² Josh. xxiv. 2-14; Ezek. xx. 8.

³ So Gesenius. Fürst makes it "God is great;" Beer, "The great race," in allusion to the tribe of Levi, which sprang from Amram.

⁴ Heb. xi. 23.

household braved the edict, and hid his birth, but it was impossible to do so permanently. The only hope of the babe's life seemed to lie in contriving a tender appeal to some humane heart, that might induce it to adopt a creature so lovely.

The plan followed was ingeniously romantic. A cradle of papyrus stems and leaves was woven together, and carefully pitched, to make it float safely and dry. An arched cover was contrived, to screen it above, and soft foldings were put within, to make a fitting nest. In this the little child was placed, and the "ark" was then laid carefully in the reedy shallow of one of the Nile canals to float slowly down with the stream. Near at hand, the infant's sister, Miriam—she from whom the world has borrowed the name "Mary"—herself a child, but bright and ready, watched the precious casket.

Amram lived not far from the palace of Rameses, in the city called after him, and to this, under Providence, the child's life and wondrous future were owing. The fact of his rescue and adoption by the daughter of the great king is given in Scripture, but we must turn to tradition for details. Rameses, it is said, had then only one child, a daughter, who was heiress to the throne, according to Egyptian law, and though married, she had no child. The Rabbis have invented for her the name Bithia, "the daughter of Jehovah," but Josephus gives her Egyptian name as Thermuthis. Coming with her female slaves to the canal to bathe, she noticed the floating cradle, and caused it to be brought ashore to her, when, lo, on opening it, a weeping babe spoke by its trouble to her womanly heart. A divine light, the Rabbis say, shone from his face, and his size and beauty riveted the eyes of the princess.

Meanwhile his sister Miriam had approached, as if by chance, and found Bithia in deep perplexity what to do. Fearing that her father would not suffer the child, which was evidently of the Hebrew race, to be taken into the palace, she sent one of her maids to ask if any of the women near could take it to nurse, but none of them would venture to brave the king's wrath. The Almighty, says the tradition, had ordered it thus, to have the child taken to its mother again, that no Egyptian woman might be able to boast that she had fed from her bosom "the Elect," who was hereafter to speak to God face to face.

At the suggestion of Miriam the princess at last directed that a Hebrew woman should be got to nurse the baby, and with quick insight, the damsel forthwith brought her mother, who had the unspeakable joy of receiving her child again, under the protection of the all-powerful daughter of him who had sought his life. "He shall be called Mo-ushe," said the princess, "for he was saved out of the water."¹

From this time, for many years, Moses was virtually an Egyptian, and he would perhaps have remained so through life but for the strange connection established, undesignedly, by the princess herself, between him and his mother. God has seldom given the world men famous in His service except from godly mothers, and the case of Moses was no exception, for his future life shows, with a sacred light, that "Jehovah" was, indeed, "her glory," as her name proclaimed. As his nurse she would have access to him through all his childhood. Weaning did not take place till an infant was two or three years old, and in rich households the mother, who in this instance would assuredly be re-

¹ Egyptian: *Mo*, "water;" *ushe*, "saved."

presented by the supposed "nurse," had the further training of a boy till he was old enough to be put under the care of a special tutor. How faithfully and wisely must Jochebed have moulded the heart of her son in these tender years, to make him the earnest and unswerving servant of Jehovah he became, not only amidst the temptations and example of universal idolatry, but in the palace of the great king, who, as such, was the high priest of the Egyptian religion.

Tradition, supported in this case by the sure word of the New Testament, relates that Bithia, delighted with having rescued so fair an innocent,¹ wished to adopt him formally as her son, and thus incorporate him with the royal blood, and make him the possible heir of the throne of Egypt.² According to Josephus she put him one day, when he was three years old, into her father's arms, and he, to please her, set the crown on the child's head, but Moses threw it off, and, springing down, trod on it. The Epistle to the Hebrews, though recording no marvellous legends like this, relates that even when "he was come to years he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches" than the accumulated wealth and unique splendour of what was then the first empire of the world.³

How great a sacrifice the deliberate choice of his own race in preference to becoming an Egyptian involved, can hardly be realized. His kind patroness had lavished

¹ Stephen says that the infant Moses was "exceeding fair;" or, as De Wette translates it, "beautiful before God" (Acts vii. 20).

² Joseph., *Antiq.*, II. 9, 6, 7.

³ Heb. xi. 24-26.

on him all the advantages of her grand position as daughter of the mighty Rameses. From his infancy he had grown up amidst a gorgeous court, in a splendid palace, the object of universal flattery and honour as the adopted son of the heiress apparent. As he grew older she had him trained "in all the wisdom"¹ of her nation, then, and for ages after, the first in the world for culture. Under the Egyptian name of Osarsiph, he is said to have been made a priest of the great temple of On, the chief university of the age, and there to have been taught the whole range of existing science and literature. No one who looks at the stately ruins which yet cover the Nile valley, or at the pictorial records still preserved on their walls, can fail to realize that civilization and knowledge had already made amazing advances in at least some directions, and their best treasures were at his command. His capacious mind received, in fact, every aid to its fullest development that wealth, a great position, and the most perfect education of the day could give, till, as Stephen expresses it, he "was mighty in words and in deeds."²

Reared as the favourite of the palace, and, as such, destined to the greatest fortunes, there can be little doubt that tradition is correct in assigning to Moses, as he grew to manhood, foremost dignities in the State. High military commands, it is said, were entrusted to him; and his deeds were worthy of his reputation. All that the world could give, in fact, lay at his feet, had he chosen to accept it at the price of denying his religion and his race.

But the lessons of his mother, and the instincts of his mind and heart, kindled a very different ambition. According to Egyptian tradition, although a priest of

¹ Acts vii. 22.

² *Ibid.*

On, he always performed his prayers, in keeping with the customs of his fathers, outside the walls, towards the east. Amidst the pomp and splendour of palaces, his heart wandered to the wretched cabins of his oppressed and suffering race. His patriotism grew with his years, till it became a passion only inferior in his soul to his devotion to the religion of his forefathers.

How long Bithia lived, or whether she listened to the secret pleadings of her adopted son, who owed so much to her, and accepted from him the knowledge of the true God, is not known. It is likely that she survived till his ripe manhood ; for at “full forty” years of age, he was still living among the Egyptians as one of them, apparently in the full sunshine of the court. But a visit he then paid to the wretched homes of his brethren abruptly dissipated all the dreams she had ever cherished of his future destiny. Unable to repress his indignation at the shameful treatment of one of his race by an Egyptian, he struck down the assailant, and hid his body in the sand which then, as now, fringed the cultivated soil. Dread of arrest, however, made further stay in Egypt impossible, and he fled to “Midian”—breaking off for ever his connection with Rameses and his gracious daughter.



A LADY WITH HER ATTENDANTS IN THE BATH.



MOSES.

BROUGHT up in the court of the great Rameses II., Moses, to all outward appearance, became entirely Egyptian. The favour of Bithia, or Merrhis, the king's only daughter and presumptive heir, made his life in these early years one long, unclouded summer morning, for all that wealth and power could command were at his service. At the University Temple of Zoan, or Heliopolis, every advantage of the highest culture of the age was put at his disposal. It was the Oxford of Ancient Egypt, the foremost of the priestly colleges of the land, those of Memphis and Thebes standing only in a secondary rank. Its high functionaries were the great personages of the State, after Pharaoh, and bore the flattering title of "The good and fair." King Sethos had set the power of Joseph on a firm basis in marrying him to Asenath, the high-priest's daughter, for it was his admission into the supreme aristocracy of Egypt.

Hither the young Moses was duly sent for his university career. The great temple dedicated to the sun, had owed its foundation to the "Spring of the Sun," which welled up on the spot, a grateful fountain in such a country, but famous then, besides, for the healing powers ascribed to it, and noted even yet as the

sweetest spring-water of the land. Nebuchadnezzar, in after years, struck down the glory of this "Beth Shemesh," or "House of the Sun,"¹ and Cambyzes finally destroyed both the temple and the town which had grown up round it. It must have been a glorious place when Moses listened to the lectures of its priestly professors on astronomy and philosophy, lectures so famous that even Plato came to attend them a thousand years later. It was the capital of the province of Goshen, the district assigned to the Hebrews, and lay on a great canal which led the waters of the Nile to north-eastern Egypt. Both temple and town were built on an artificial mound, to save them from inundation by the Nile. On the north side stood the town, on the south the temple. An avenue of colossal sphinxes led to the huge gateways of the latter, surrounded by huge flag-staffs, from which floated blue and red streamers. Lofty obelisks of polished red granite stood in pairs before the temple and within its courts, in keeping with the worship of the sun-god whose rays were symbolized by both obelisks and pyramids. One alone remains, fifty-eight feet high, covered with hieroglyphics, but in the days of Moses there were two raised by the son of Sesostris, which cast their shadows from amidst a crowd of others, from a height of a hundred and fifty feet.

Round the cloisters of the vast painted courts to which all this magnificence led, were the mansions and lecture halls of the priests, philosophers, canons, and professors of the famous sanctuary, and in these shady and luxurious retreats Moses spent many happy years, first as pupil, then as colleague of the learned corporation. Egyptians knew him only as Osarsiph, or

¹ Jer. xliii. 13.

Tisithes—"The priest of Osiris,"¹ the sun-god,—and fancied, no doubt, as he passed before them in his pure white priestly robe, that he had no dream of anything beyond their own idolatry.

But, meanwhile, the misery of his nation had gone on increasing. The Egyptian peasants of our own day chant sad refrains against their oppressors as they toil in the fields, or at the shadoofs for irrigation:—"The chief of the village, the chief of the village, may the dogs tear him, may the dogs tear him!" or, "They starve us, they starve us, they beat us, they beat us!" to which there rises an antiphony, "But there's some one above, there's some one above, who will punish them well, who will punish them well."² Things were evidently much the same then, and Moses noted them with a heart in which the love of his people was fast rising to a supreme passion. His early training by his godly mother had fixed his character from his boyhood.

That he should have been able, with his strong feelings, to suppress all outward show of them during his early manhood, reveals the power of self-control, and of patient waiting for the right time, which mark a great mind. He was known by his brethren as a Jew at court. His name was whispered in all their slave huts with vague expectations. But the hour had not

¹ Tisithes was another name for Osiris, though, primarily, that of Sirius, the dog-star—the brightest star in the heavens. It would require 400 of our suns to send as bright a light from the same distance as this one star yields. In keeping with their wild fancies, the Rabbis maintained that the name Tisithes alluded to the transmigration of the soul of Seth into the body of Moses, to give the law, "which men had forgotten," through him.

² Nassau Senior's *MS. Journal of a Stay in Egypt*, 1856.

come. To have sympathised with them openly would have been fatal both to them and himself. God was training him as their future deliverer, though he did not know it. He was getting a thorough insight into the religion, manners, and life of Egypt; he was being brought into contact with her greatest men, and learning all the secrets of statecraft in the chambers of Pharaoh himself. The fullest knowledge of mankind, and of religious, political, and social science, were necessary for the future founder of a nation, and premature action would have broken off his training in them at once.

But, though outwardly reserved, he had long chosen his part. With a magnanimity which is almost impossible to realize, he had deliberately resolved to cast in his lot with his own race—to suffer with them, to dry their tears, to free them at any cost to himself, rather than share the splendour wrung from them by the tyrant in whose halls a strange providence had fixed his home. Fear had no power to keep him back; and even royal prosperity could not seduce him from his grand self-sacrifice of patriotism and faith.

At last, when he was forty years of age, a sudden outburst of irrepressible indignation at an Egyptian taskmaster, who was maltreating a Hebrew,¹ changed his whole life. The oppressor fell dead before him; and though he was hurriedly buried in the desert-sands

¹ Likely by the bastinado, which is constantly seen in use on the ancient monuments. The hasty burial in the sand prevented embalming and thus destroyed the possibility of the body awaiting, intact, the day of resurrection. But those only hoped to rise again whose bodies were thus preserved, and hence to prevent embalming was in effect to take away the hope of the future life. This made the crime of Moses especially abhorrent to the Egyptian mind.

close by, the act left no choice to Moses but flight—for it was speedily bruited through the Hebrew villages. The direction he took marked his character. Passing along the one road on the north, from Egypt to the east,—the narrow ridge of sand between the Mediterranean and the Serbonian gulf—he turned to the south, after passing through the Great Wall, at Pelusium, and fled to the Arab tribes of the peninsula of Sinai, among whom the knowledge of the true God was still preserved, as it had been in Canaan by Melchisedek in the days of Abraham.

Somewhere in the mountainous valleys of Sinai and Horeb,¹ the seven daughters of an Arab sheik, “the priest of Midian,”—as sheiks still are of their encampments or tribes,²—were tending their father’s flocks; for Arabs even yet think it below their dignity to do any work, and leave their sheep to the care of their wives and daughters, or slaves.³ Like Jacob at Padan Aram, Moses, still dressed as an Egyptian, hastened to aid them in their laborious task; and further earned their favour by defending them from some shepherds, who were disposed to trouble them. An introduction to their father, and an engagement in his service, having naturally followed, the courtier and possible heir of Rameses silently descended to the post of a shepherd. His master’s name was Jethro—“The chief;” or rather Reu-el—“One that fears God”⁴—a proof that the wanderer had chosen his retreat in a district where his faith was in honour. As in the case

¹ The meaning of the name of “Sinai” is unknown. That of “Horeb” is “The dry, the desert.”

² Robinson’s *Palestine*, vol. ii. p. 402.

³ Burkhardt’s *Syria*, p. 858,

⁴ Exod. ii. 18.

of Jacob, marriage to a daughter of the house ere long followed; and Zipporah—"The little bird"—became his wife. Two sons blessed the union—Gershom—"The child of the *driven-out* man"; and Eliezer—"For the *God* of my fathers *is my help*."¹

For many years—forty, in the belief of the later Jews²—Moses now passes from view. It was well he should have the stillness and retirement of the desert to ripen his long-brooding thoughts of the possible deliverance of his people by his hands. He would learn the free life of the wilderness, and the deep hatred of Egypt in the hearts of the tribes among whom his lot was cast. But the task was heavy and difficult beyond conception, and the self-distrust of modest greatness shrank from attempting it. It was in these years, however, beyond question, that he revolved and elaborated many points of his future scheme as the Lawgiver and Prophet of his nation, for God had chosen him as His servant, to work their deliverance, and was slowly fitting him for the mighty work. At last a mysterious vision brought the second stage in his life to a close, and led him to assume the part for which all his previous history had been designed to train him. He had led his flock to the depths of the solemn valleys where Sinai and Horeb rise in awful grandeur, bare and stern, when suddenly, close at hand, a clump of the thorny bushes that sprinkle the lower edge of these awful heights appeared as if burning, and yet, as he gazed, it remained unharmed. No fitter symbol of Israel under God's protection, even in Egyptian bondage, could have been found, and now a voice made clear that it was no mere natural wonder, but a sign of the present God.

¹ Exod. xviii. 3, 4.

² Acts vii. 30.

The character of Moses receives vivid illustration from what followed. Commissioned by the Almighty to undertake the deliverance of His people, he draws back in humble unwillingness to venture on so great a task. If possible he will be excused, and urges one reason after another. At last a leprous hand, another symbol of the results of Egyptian bondage, leaves no room for further question, but he still falls back on his want of natural eloquence to persuade the multitude, entreating, "Lord, send by whom Thou wilt, but only not by me!"

Yet, when the command is imperative, there is no further shrinking. The new name of God—I AM—then given, becomes his over-mastering thought henceforth. He accepts the responsibilities of his high duty, and henceforth lives only as the mouthpiece of Jehovah.

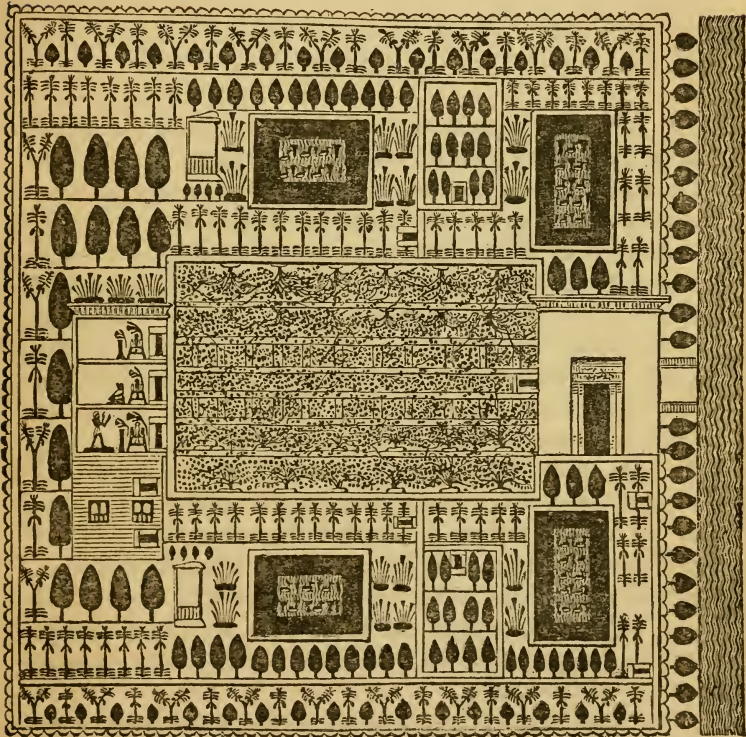
What it involved to bring about the exodus we can only faintly imagine. The opposition of a mighty king—for though Rameses was dead, and his successor was a weak and wicked man, Egypt was still a great kingdom—the dull insensibility of those for whom he was labouring; the dread of increasing their sufferings by his attempts to end them; the apprehension, soon realized, that the immediate result would rouse even his countrymen, for whom he was daring all, against him; the long consuming struggle against misconception, distrust, and the slave-vices of a degraded race; the stupendous difficulty of rousing their long dormant religious instincts, which alone would make the movement national and worthy, might well have overwhelmed him. But he triumphed, by God's help, in the end, and Israel encamped in the very solitudes which the burning bush had sanctified—a free nation.

Henceforth the character of Moses divides itself into

that of a Leader of his people, and the Founder of its religion and social and political constitution. Into the details of his course in these different aspects we cannot enter. As Leader of Israel, he guided them wisely and safely through forty years to the edge of Canaan. The long sojourn in the desert was needed to train them for separate life in their own land. As the Founder of their religion, he gave them a creed which, in the course of ages, prepared for the perfect revelation of Bethlehem and Nazareth. Its one central conception of the living God, the Father—the Protector—the Judge—ever present—was itself the sublimest gift ever received by man, till the still greater gift of the teachings of Jesus Christ. His social and political system gradually formed a nation which has maintained itself as such for nearly three thousand five hundred years, and it is still in its fundamental principles, as far as circumstances allow, their law over the earth.

No figure of ancient history stands out so grandly, because no one else is so surrounded by the splendour of a constantly recognised Divine presence. But even in other ways elements of character display themselves which command our homage and admiration. He was the meekest of men, not perhaps in his being free from sudden accessions of feeling and correspondent action, but in the long patient endurance implied in the creation of a free people from a corrupted and sunken population of slaves. To educate and mould the character of a nation, presumes a grand character in him who effects it. The strength of purpose and firmness to principle, which sacrificed the greatest prospects to the good of his race; the utter unselfishness of his devotion to them till death; his freedom from ambition, shown in his founding no dynasty, but leaving his sons mere citizens,

soon to be lost in the multitude ; his majestic tenacity of purpose through all discouragements, and his unique success in his amazing enterprise, mark him as one of the greatest of men who ever lived,—perhaps the greatest.



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN GARDEN ;—with Vineyard and Trees, Fish Ponds, House, etc.
A Canal flows past, outside.



AARON.

AARON, or, more correctly, Aharon, was the elder brother of Moses by about three years, and though far below him in grandeur of character, takes, with him, the first place among the founders of the Hebrew nation.

Amidst all their oppression the Israelites had maintained their tribal constitution, and had even organized a special internal government under "elders"—a name, as we shall hereafter see, given, in common, to the heads of whole tribes, and also of their subdivisions. The two illustrious brothers were of the family of Levi, and ranked among the aristocracy of their race. Amram, their father, was a grandson of the founder of his tribe, and Aaron, who was known among his people as its representative,¹ married the daughter of the prince of the tribe of Judah.² It seems hard, moreover, to understand the deference at once paid to Moses and him, alike by Pharaoh and their own brethren, except on the ground that they seemed to both the natural leaders of the nation.

The condition of Egypt at the close of the long reign of Rameses II. was favourable for an attempt on the part of the slave population to gain their liberty. Besides the Hebrews, there were multitudes of different

¹ Exod. iv. 14.

² Exod. vi. 23; Ruth iv. 19.

nationalities who had been brought to the country as prisoners of war, and, as usual, had been reduced to servitude.

The great king had reigned over sixty-six years, and had maintained his glory to the last, yet Egypt had already begun to decline. The kingdoms of Asia were becoming too powerful for it to resist them, and so large an Asiatic population had been introduced into the Delta, by the importation of prisoners of war, that it was visibly affecting the native race and its religion.

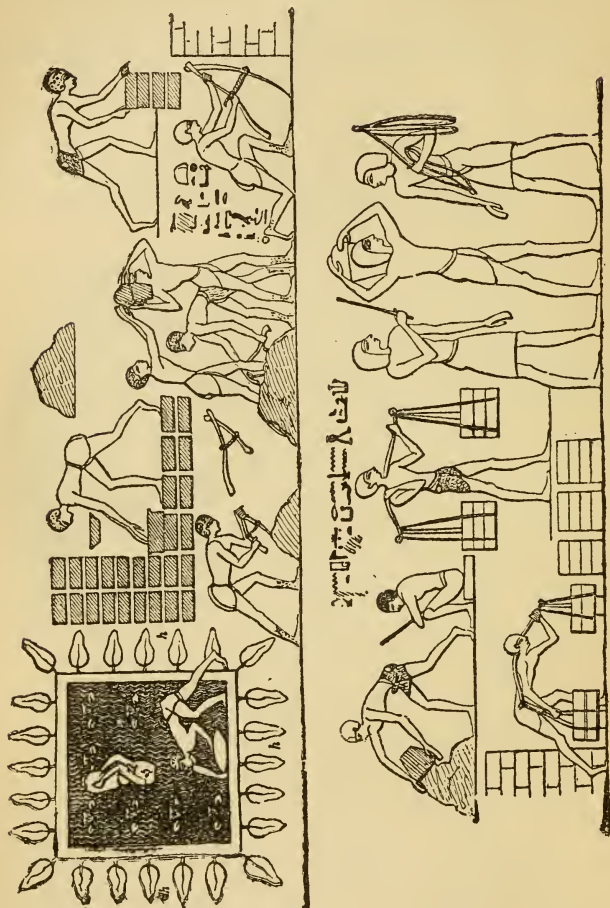
Menephtah, the successor of Rameses, was his thirteenth son, all his elder brothers having died during his father's life. It may be that their death was the source of the traditions respecting the intended adoption of Moses, the favourite of the great king's daughter, into the line of succession. But another son had risen and had survived, and naturally succeeded to the throne.



MENEPTAH.

It was the peculiarity of Egypt that it often passed rapidly from the highest prosperity to deep depression. Rameses had foreseen impending dangers before his death, and to guard against them had removed many of his Asiatic prisoners to the south, replacing them with negro slaves in the north. "Pithom and Rameses," which the Hebrews were forced to build, were not only store cities, but fortresses, to protect the great wall he had raised from Pelusium to Heroöpolis, for the defence of the exposed eastern side of Egypt, against

Asiatic races; and bricks of sun-dried clay and straw,



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN BRICKMAKING, UNDER TASKMASTERS.

stamped with his name, still illustrate the "heavy service" exacted, as the Book of Exodus describes.

The ferment and uneasiness long gathering in the huge servile population, speedily showed itself in open revolt after the death of Rameses. The Delta was in a flame of insurrection, and it was necessary to remove the capital to Memphis, in its midst, to keep down the struggling myriads, and also to guard against any attempt to aid them from either the east or west. The monuments and records inform us that such precautions were indeed a vital necessity, for the Libyan nations, induced by the internal distraction of the Delta, and by the weakness of the Egyptian forces on the western boundaries, allied themselves with mercenaries from Sardinia, Sicily, Etruria, Lycia, and Greece, and, having invaded Egypt, were with difficulty repelled. Still more severe measures of repression were demanded to break the spirit of the rebellious slave communities, and the brickmakers of Rameses were condemned to send in a certain number each day, whatever the difficulty in doing so.¹ It is strange to read this in contemporary records, confirming, as it does so strongly, the Bible narrative.

The region to which Moses had fled was near a line of travel between Egypt and the East; for "the well," at which he met Jethro's daughters, must in such parts have attracted passing caravans; and, indeed, must have determined their route. The Sinai peninsula, moreover, had for ages been the great mining district of Egyptian adventurers, and even of the kings. Information would thus reach the exile of the state of things under the new monarch, and help to confirm him in his loyal acceptance of the high commission to be their deliverer.

¹ For details, see Birch's *Ancient History from the Monuments*—"Egypt," pp. 125-133.

The state of affairs had turned the thoughts of Aaron in the same direction as those of Moses. Both, unknown to each other, had been long pondering the possibility of rescuing their nation from its degradation and misery; and now a Divine impulse urged the elder to seek his long-lost brother, whose training and genius so eminently fitted him to be the leader in any scheme of deliverance. The two met at Sinai,¹ both overjoyed at a reunion which was never again to be broken. Each had much to tell the other: plans had to be formed in accordance with the revealed purpose of God; there were hopes and fears to heighten or abate, and these shortened the way to Egypt, to which they forthwith returned.

The first step taken was to summon the "elders" of Israel, and communicate to them what was intended. The descendants of Jacob, like the old Germans or the Scotch Highlanders, seem from the first to have had divisions and subdivisions into clans and families. At the head of each tribe stood a "prince" or head, and under these heads of "families" and of "houses"—the former acting as chiefs of the different branches of a tribe; the latter having under them a certain number of households. As many of these as it was safe to gather together were presently summoned to meet the two brothers; and thus a communication was opened between them and the whole nation, and advantage taken of an existing organization, by which action could be adopted almost simultaneously over the whole Hebrew district.

The character of Aaron is first seen after this inauguration of the great scheme of deliverance.

In contrast to his brother, he had fluent eloquence, for, like many other great minds, Moses was less

¹ Exod. iv. 27.

able to express his conceptions in speech than weaker men. In all that the latter thought, planned, or proposed we see the creative power which marks a supreme intellect: Aaron appears only in a subordinate and dependent position, and shows signs of failure as often as he acts for himself. Moses is the inspired prophet, the founder and creator of a new future for his down-trodden and degraded people. Aaron is only the mouth-piece of his brother, able to express his thoughts in fitting language even before the highest, and to carry out, with dexterous readiness, what his great brother had planned with heavy mental struggles, and a heart trembling under its responsibilities. He is the speaker alike before the elders and before Pharaoh. Most of the miracles were wrought by him, though only in accordance with the directions of Moses;¹ but from the moment the Exodus is begun Moses takes the leadership, and henceforth stands the unquestioned head of the nation.

The relative position of the brothers was strikingly shown at Sinai, where Moses alone was permitted to come near Jehovah, while Aaron, with his sons Nadab—"The Generous One"—and Abihu—"Whose *Father* is *Jehovah*"—and seventy of "the elders of Israel," were only allowed to worship afar off.

Left as temporary head in the absence of Moses in the Mount of the Law, Aaron's unfitness for the great work his brother had been raised to carry out became apparent. As day after day passed without Moses returning, the people, with the impatience natural to rude minds, concluded that they were forsaken, and began to clamour, they scarcely knew for what. They had been accustomed to the gorgeous idolatry of Egypt—with

¹ Exod. vii. 19.

its great temples, robed priests, and grandly bedecked images of the gods, and could not realize the existence of a God without such an outward symbol. To rise to the conception of a purely spiritual religion was too great an effort for minds habituated to the opposite, and could only be permanently attained, even by their descendants, after the discipline of many centuries, and of a second captivity in Babylon.

The god Osiris—the sun—had been worshipped in their district in Egypt under the symbol of a golden calf, or rather ox, Mnevis, or Apis; and such symbols the multitude now loudly demanded, to be “the gods that brought them out of the land of Egypt.”¹ They had no idea of repudiating Jehovah, or turning to the worship of Egyptian idols, but wished to have some visible emblem of Him to which they might look. The second commandment had been given only a few days before amidst thunders and lightnings and clouds, and “the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud”—and had forbidden all graven images or the likeness of any thing in heaven—star or comet—or on earth, or in the waters—the creature idols of the Egyptians—but neither Aaron nor the people had let the words sink into their hearts. Afraid of the fierce, noisy multitude, he weakly gave way to their request, and made the golden calf. The first step in so fatal a policy was immediately followed by the worst results. “A feast to Jehovah,” at which the new idol was to be unveiled, was proclaimed, but it presently passed into the wild and sensual excesses associated with similar revels in Egypt.

¹ As already noticed, some scholars think that the calf was a symbol borrowed from the idolatry of Western Asia. Moloch was the ox-god of the Asiatic tribes of the Delta. See Geikie's *Hours with the Bible*, vol. ii. p. 279.

The severe rebuke of Moses, the weak excuse of Aaron, and the punishment inflicted on the idolaters, mark the difference between the two brothers.

On one occasion only does there seem to have been any estrangement between them, and in it Aaron seems to have acted, with his accustomed dependence on others, under the instigation of Miriam.² On all other occasions he appears the faithful colleague and assistant of Moses.

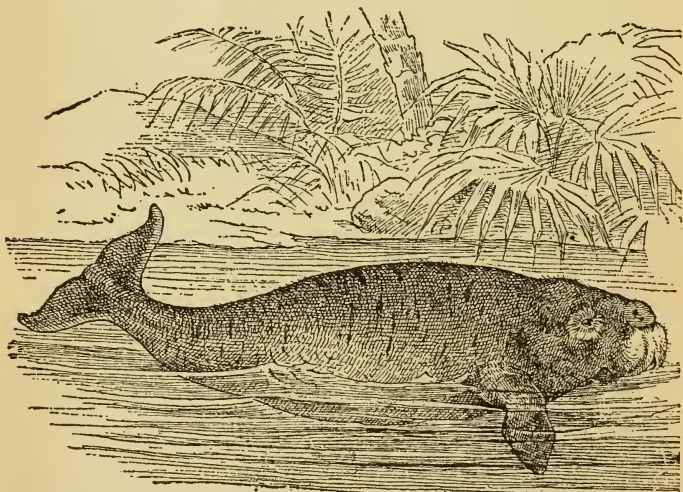
Till that time the head of each household had acted as family priest, but, by Divine direction, Aaron and his descendants were set apart by Moses as the consecrated priesthood of the nation. The jealousy of pre-eminent position which had assailed Moses now turned against Aaron also, and it was not without a severe struggle that the new dignity was left to his tribe. He had to mourn over two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu, who perished for rash intrusion on the sacred office, and at a later time, a revolt headed by Korah and others was only quenched by severe judgments. In the end, however, the new ecclesiastical constitution was recognised, and Aaron became the first of the long line of High Priests, which ended only with the final destruction of Jeruśalem, sixteen hundred years later.

In common with Moses, Aaron incurred the penalty of not being allowed to enter the Holy Land, and, as with his brother, a lonely mountain was chosen as the spot where he should breathe his last. One of the barren hills on the borders of Edom, it is not known which, saw his death.

Eloquent, but, like many eloquent men, impulsive and comparatively unstable; leaning through life, wherever he could, on a stronger mind than his own; incapable

¹ Num. xii.

of the patient endurance and calm self-command which must be seen in a leader of men, Aaron, nevertheless, remains one whose earnest devotion to God and His people we must devoutly admire. A good, upright man, jealous for the faith of his fathers ; self-sacrificing in his efforts to carry out the commands entrusted to him ; wise and faithful as a rule ; tender and pitiful to the erring, even to self-exposure in time of plague, for their good ; he was yet weak in danger, irresolute, wanting in firmness, and not free from fear of man, though humble and full of regret when he came to see his error. Such men are valuable in society, when led by those wiser and stronger than themselves, but apt to fail when left to their own guidance.



THE "DUGONG," from which the so-called "badger skin" was obtained for the covering of the Tabernacle.



BALAAM.

THE close of the wilderness journeyings of Israel was a pleasing contrast to some of its earlier stages. Leaving the comparatively barren districts south of the Dead Sea, Moses had led the tribes as far north as was necessary for their crossing easily to the centre of Palestine, by turning their march to the west. The territory they now skirted had formerly belonged, throughout, to the kingdom of Moab, but the northern part of it had been seized by the warlike hill clans of the Amorites, and was now in their possession. Sihon, their king—"The Sweeper away" of all before him—had taken the rich pasture-land south of the Jabbok, and had driven the Moabites southwards, across the wide chasm of the Arnon, which from that time formed the boundary between the two hostile peoples.¹

The approach of the vast encampment of the Hebrews naturally alarmed the populations it seemed to threaten. In such an age the proposal of a peaceable march through neutral territory to a point beyond it, must have seemed a mere pretence to gain an entrance which would virtually give possession of a land thus left defenceless.

¹ The Amorites were the "dwellers on summits," building their towns on the tops of hills, so that the walls seemed to the spies to reach to heaven. The Canaanites were the "lowlanders."

When, therefore, Moses requested leave from Sihon to march through his kingdom, it was of no use that he promised simply to pass along the public roads without injuring person or property: the only answer was a fierce refusal, and the advance of an army to drive back Israel from the frontier. A battle followed, in which Sihon and his sons were killed, his people utterly broken, and their land, cattle, and cities seized as the spoil of war.¹

Even before this rich conquest, the people had reached, in the well-watered uplands of the Arnon—"The swift" and "noisy"—a district the brawling streams of which must have been a delightful contrast to the arid regions they had left. Song and rejoicing filled the camp:² it was an earnest of the richness of the land towards which they were making. The whole fertile tract from the Arnon to Hermon, embracing all Gilead and Bashan, was now theirs, with its wooded hills, well-watered valleys, and boundless stretches of arable land and pasture on the broad steppes of the Hauran.

Moab had never relinquished the hope of winning back from the Amorites the lands taken by them for a time. But the appearance of Israel as a new owner, by right of conquest, seemed to cloud their prospect, and substitute another victorious people as the wrongful holders of the territory they still counted theirs.

The position of Moab was, indeed, in every way full of alarm. Already stripped of more than half its territory, it seemed now in danger of losing the rest. Zippor—"The Bird," father of Balak, the reigning king—had lost his life in the battle with Sihon, which had cost him also the greater and richer part of his kingdom.

¹ Num. xxi. 21, 23-25, 31; Deut. ii. 32, 33.

² Num. xxi. 17.

Seeing the utter overthrow of the Amorites, the conquerors of his own people, Balak, in "sore distress," sent messengers to the elders of Midian, a related tribe, urging them, in a figure well suited to a pastoral race, to come to his help, else "this people will lick up all round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field."

But he did not confine himself, in his terror, to mere warlike precautions. It was the firm belief of antiquity, that the blessing or curse of eminent religious men carried, irresistibly, with it, good or evil to a person or community.

Far off, on the Upper Euphrates,¹ among the mountains of Aram or Armenia, amongst which it rises, lay the fortress town of Pethor, one of the northern bulwarks of Assyria.² It was then famous, however, not for its strength, but as the home of a great prophet—Balaam, son of Beor—"The Torch"—an Assyrian, whose fame had crossed the desert and reached Moab, on the shores of the Dead Sea. His very name, "The conqueror of the people," seemed to point him out as a seer, whose blessing or curse was of mightiest power. Perhaps in him Balak might find one able to overcome Moses, and avert the peril that hung over Moab.

A hasty message forthwith sped over the desert, by a joint embassy of the elders of Midian and Moab, carrying with them the gifts usually presented to a "prophet," to induce him to use his "divinations."³ What followed has given rise to the most opposite estimates of Balaam's character. While some have

¹ Num. xxii. 5.

² George Smith's *Assyria*, p. 33.

³ Thus Saul asks his servant what present here is to give to Samuel, "to tell us our way" (1 Sam. ix. 8); and the gifts to the priests of heathen nations are well known.

seen in him the most dutiful obedience to the voice of God, others have recognised, as it seems to us justly, a man at bottom wholly unprincipled—trying to deceive himself into the belief that he is acting in obedience to conscience and revelation, while he is sinning against both;¹ ready to do anything that may further his worldly advancement;² and, while holding the purest form of religion, willingly pursuing a course immeasurably below it.³ It is hard to tell how far he was insincere or the reverse in the earlier part of his action, but it is certain that his final counsel to Balak shows a terrible fall from the lofty tone he had at first maintained, and his death proves the contradiction that, at least in the end, displayed itself between his words and his deeds.

The whole story is intensely Oriental and primeval. The first deputation is dismissed in obedience to a Divine warning; but, so far as we know, “the wages of unrighteousness” which Balaam “loved,” are carefully retained.⁴ A second embassy of nobler messengers, carrying richer gifts, succeeds. He does not at once dismiss them, as God had required, but presses for permission to go with them, which at last is granted. He would fain earn the wealth and honour apparently in his grasp, yet knows that when the prophetic afflatus comes on him he can only utter what it prompts. With a feigned religiousness, he protests that if Balak were to give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of Jehovah his God, to do less or more; but he also bids them wait overnight to see if he may not, after all, be allowed to go with them. If

¹ Butler's *Sermons*, vol. vii.

² Newman's *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 21.

³ Arnold's *Sermons*, vol. vi. pp. 55, 56.

⁴ 2 Pet. ii. 15.

his ignoble wish to be allowed to curse an unoffending nation be gratified, he has the wealth he craves: if it be refused, he can appeal to his words as proof of his being only the mouthpiece of God. That he should have been allowed to go with Balak's messenger, was only the permission given every man to act as a free agent, and in no way altered the Divine command, that he should bless and not curse. Yet he goes, as if, perchance, at liberty to do either, and lets Balak deceive himself by false hopes, when the will of God has been already decisively made known.

Arrived in Moab, Balaam found Balak in the extremest terror. He was willing to offer up even his eldest son to his gods, if required, to deliver his nation. Nothing shows more vividly the enlightened and almost Christian views of this Prophet among the heathen, than a fragment of the first conversation between him and Balak, preserved in Micah.¹

"Wherewith," asks Balak, in his agony, "shall I come before Jehovah (thy God), and bow myself before the God of heaven (the height)? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?"

"Has Jehovah pleasure," answers Balaam, "in thousands of rams, or in ten thousands of streams of oil?"

"Shall I" then "give my first born (son) as the sacrifice expected?" cries the agonized king; "the fruit of my body as expiation for my soul?"²

"He has told thee, O man," replies Balaam, finely, "what is good; and what does Jehovah require of thee

¹ Micah vi. 6-8.

² In 2 Kings iii. 27 we have an instance of another king of Moab in a similar dire extremity actually offering up his eldest son as a burnt sacrifice.

but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God !”

Nothing could be nobler than this beginning, but how contradictory is the sequel ! Balak, in his excited distress, takes him to one peak after another of the long range of the hills of Moab, that he may see the wide encampments of Israel on the steppes, or in the deep valley of the Jordan beneath them. Balaam follows him, willing to curse, if possible, though he already knew God’s mind. They climb wearily to the “high places of Baal,” on the top of the mountains, to the summit of one of the peaks of the Pisgah range, and to the top of “Peor,” that he might see the vast extent of the hosts Balak dreaded ; and on each summit Balaam uses his “enchantments” to try to extort leave to curse them, and seeks to forget the warning of conscience and the voice of God, in the excitement of mighty sacrifices. It is of no use. Falling prostrate in the prophetic trance, but with the eyes of his mind and spirit open, a vision of the immediate and distant future unrolls itself before him, and he cannot control his utterances.¹ He still sees the wide landscape of mountain, valley, and desert, the homes of many populations ; and far away in the bosom of the Mediterranean he pictures to himself the isles of western races, then first mentioned in Scripture. Beneath him, in the Valley of the Acacias, stretch out the tents of Israel, spreading like valleys, like gardens beside the streams of his native land, like aloe trees which Jehovah has planted, like cedars by the waters. He seems to see a stream, the type of Israel, widening as it flows, till it broadens to many waters—the image to an Oriental of a triumphant future. Jehovah, their

¹ Num. xxiv. 4.

God, is with His people, and the trumpet-sounds of a king are among them! They have the fierce swiftness of the buffalo that mocks the hunters: they rouse themselves like a lion that will not lie down till he has consumed the prey and drunk its blood! He will devour his enemies, and crush their bones, and break through the circle of the archers sent against him, and then, lying down in his majesty, who shall rouse him?

Enraged with disappointment, Balak tries once more to wring from Balaam the curse he wishes, but the inspiration only bears the prophet away to grander visions. He beholds, but not nigh, a star—the symbol of a great prince—come out of Jacob, and “a sceptre,” like the shepherd’s staff that marked the ruler of a tribe, rise out of Israel—and it shatters Moab on every side, and destroys those who are against the people of God. Edom, whose red mountains gleamed in the south, shall be the possession of the mighty ruler thus foreseen—the son of Jesse, himself the type of the greater David—the Messiah to follow!

But, as he gazes, the vision takes a wider sweep. The plundering hordes of Amalek ranged the desert which lay on the edge of the horizon: they are the first of nations now, but they are doomed to perish! The dwellings of the Kenites were before him, across the Dead Sea, in the cliffs of Engedi. But though their nest be in the rocks, they shall be driven out and led away captive by Assyria. “Who shall live,” he continued, “when God sets Assyria to His work of wrath?” But ships shall come from the coast of Chittim—the island of Cyprus, the one glimpse of the western world visible from the hills of Palestine, and thus the symbol of western power—and will break

Assyria and Eber—"the people beyond" the Euphrates—and they also shall perish for ever!

Utterances so lofty might have led us to think of him who had been chosen from among the heathen to proclaim them, as a true servant of Jehovah, whom he professed to follow. But if he knew God, and was used by Him as His instrument to make known His will, he had no earnest depth of religious feeling, no true devotion of soul. What shall we say of one who, while inspired to speak thus, could give the sinister counsel to Balak, that though God had not allowed him to curse Israel, the same end might be gained by other means? The worship of the Moabite god, Baal Peor, was a consecration of sensuality: let a feast to him be proclaimed, and Israel invited. Amidst the lewd temptations of unbridled impurity, they would bring down on themselves that curse which was not allowed to be uttered in words!¹

Can it be wondered that one who knew the right so well, and so basely lent himself to that which was basest and worst, should be the type, to the sacred writers, of all that was most to be shunned in a seducing teacher, so that, even in the last books of Scripture, his name is uttered as an awful warning?

Sold to evil, Balaam clung to the god he had chosen, and joined Moab and Midian in their vain attempts to crush Israel in battle—for he was a warrior as well as a prophet. But his dead body, left on the battle-field, proclaimed the folly as well as guilt of knowing the better course and choosing the worse.

¹ Num. xxv. 1-5; Rev. ii. 14.





MIRIAM.

MIRIAM,—whose name, in its later forms, became that of “Mariamne,” the loved and murdered wife of Herod the Great, and, as “Mariam,” or “Maria,” and “Mary,” that of the mother of our Lord,—was the sister of Moses, the eldest of the family, as Moses was the youngest. Her present name seems to have been given to her in later life, for its meaning—“Their rebellion”—appears to be an allusion to the painful incident of her one difference with her august brother, on the occasion of his second marriage which she and Aaron resented.¹

Rabbinical fables relate that she was only five years old at the time of her first mention in Scripture; but, however young, her ready quickness in securing for the infant Moses the care of his mother, laid him under an abiding sense of obligation, which showed itself throughout his life, in the power she exerted over him. Her superiority of age, added to this feeling of gratitude on his part, gave her an independence and high position which made her famous, even in later ages, as one of the three deliverers of her nation.²

It is difficult to carry ourselves back to those remote times, and realize life as it then was among the Hebrews.

¹ Num. xii. 1, 2.

² Micah vi. 4 (B.C. about 750).

In the tombs of Benihasan there is a remarkable mural painting which may help us to do so. A number of foreigners, of some race kindred to the Jews, are represented as arriving at the court of Pharaoh, and being presented to him. The details offer what seems a striking parallel to the arrival of Jacob in Egypt. The men are draped in long garments of various colours, wearing sandals, like open shoes, with numerous straps. They are armed with bows, arrows, spears, and clubs. One is playing on a seven-stringed lyre, the counterpart, doubtless, of the harp, so often mentioned in later Jewish history. Four women accompany them, dressed in garments which reach below the knees, and wearing fillets round their hair, and ornaments on their ankles, but barefooted. A boy armed with a spear walks at their side, and two children in panniers on an ass, precede them, while another ass has empty panniers, but carries some spears and shields.¹ This may not give an exact idea of the rude simplicity of Hebrew life in the days of Miriam, but it brings it before us approximately.

At the time of the Exodus, Moses, the youngest of his father's children, was already eighty years of age, at least according to later Rabbinical belief,² so that Miriam must have been nearly ninety when she accompanied him and her race in their hasty flight from bondage.

The route taken on that eventful march has lately been explained, very differently from the theories hitherto accepted. Dr. Brugsch,³ an eminent Egypto-

¹ Birch's *Egypt from the Monuments*, p. 66. See Illustration in *Hours with the Bible*, vol. i. p. 360.

² Acts vii. 23, 30.

³ *Transactions of Congress of Orientalists*, 1874, pp. 260-282.

logist, who has passed many years in the country, claims to have identified all the stations mentioned in Exodus, with sites along the coast of the Mediterranean. The whole district assigned to the Hebrews was more or less marshy, and only one highway led through it into the wilderness outside. This ran past Migdol,—“The Tower,”—still marked by its Egyptian equivalent “Samout,”—one of the frontier defences towards the Arabian desert,—to Baalzephon—the town of “The Lord of the North.” It thence passed, along a narrow ridge of sand on the coast, with the Mediterranean on the one hand, and “the gulfs”—Pi-hahiroth—now known as the bottomless marshes of Serbonis, on the other. The sea, raised by storms, not infrequently inundates this perilous bridge, and on one occasion drowned a great part of the army of Artaxerxes, who was attempting to invade Egypt. Brugsch supposes that a tempest, sent by Providence, flooded the sand ridge and the surrounding country, after the Israelites had passed, and caused the destruction of Pharaoh’s host, by making it impossible for them to know their way among the terrible dangers of Serbonis. It may be that it was in this way, and at this place, that God wrought His mighty deliverance of His people. The identifications of the route, however, have been widely challenged, though the use of the phrase “Red Sea” in our version,¹ in reality proves nothing, as the Hebrew word is “Weedy,” not “Red,”—a characteristic pre-eminently true of the Sirbonian marshes, with their wide beds of papyrus. The recent survey of the isthmus of Suez by Dr. Hull, seems to show, however, that the Red Sea extended much farther to the north at the time of the Exodus than it does now. This, of course,

● ¹ Exod. xv. 4.

would make any identification of the towns so named on the route of the Hebrews very difficult.

In common with her two brothers, Miriam enjoyed the mysterious honour which is implied in the name "Prophetess."¹ In high rejoicing at the wonderful intervention of God on behalf of His people, Moses composed a triumphal psalm, which was chanted by the multitude in the first hours of their excited devotion at the deliverance vouchsafed them. Miriam, instinct with some of her brother's genius, and touched by the same prophetic fire, roused the women of the nation by her glowing enthusiasm, and taking a tabret in her hand—apparently, like our modern tambourine, a wooden rim, covered with membrane, and hung round with bells or rattles—headed them, in religious songs and dances, to the music of similar instruments. The refrain of one song alone remains—"Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."

The next mention of her name is in connection with the marriage of Moses with a Cushite woman, or negress.² Strange as this may seem to us, and contrary as it was to the traditions of the Hebrews, and to his own subsequent legislation,³ there was much in his Egyptian education to make it more natural than might be supposed. From the first, of mixed blood, the Egyptians became increasingly so, as their wars with the negro kingdoms led to the settlement among them of vast numbers of prisoners. There was no prejudice of colour, for all had more or less dark blood in their veins, and intermarriage between all shades was so common, that a negress had been queen of Egypt in

¹ Exod. xv. 20.

² Num. xii.

³ Exod. xxxiv. 15, 16; Deut. vii. 3, 4; xxiii. 3, 7, 8, etc.

the dynasty preceding that under which Moses was born, and the same thing had already happened at an earlier period.¹ The native royal family had taken refuge in the south during the long triumph of the Shepherd Kings, and alliance with the daughters of negro kings had thus become frequent. Moses only copied the example of the highest of the land by marrying a Cushite.

But though in keeping with Egyptian usage, the marriage was distasteful to Miriam, and she excited Aaron also against it. She seems to have felt wounded, as was natural in a woman, by her brother having acted without consulting her on the matter, and she foolishly gave vent to her irritation in words which might have spread discontent in the camp had they passed unreprieved. "Has Jehovah," said she, "indeed spoken only by Moses? Has he not spoken also by us?" It appeared as if she disputed his position as the head of the people, and wished herself and Aaron advanced to equal dignity. Her rank and influence demanded an instant vindication of Moses as the one leader chosen by God, and this fell on her in the grievous form of a visitation of the hateful Egyptian leprosy. From all but the highest eminence she was, in a moment, struck down beneath the lowest in the camp, and could no longer remain in it. There could be no more ambitious dreaming, no more insubordination, after so dreadful a lesson. It went to the heart even of Aaron, almost as keenly as her own. "Alas, my lord," cried the humbled man to his mighty brother, "I beseech thee, lay not these sins upon us wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be like a dead-birth, born with its flesh half gone!"

¹ Birch's *Ancient Egypt*, p. 81.

“Heal her, O God!” entreated Moses. But the offence was too great for immediate pardon, and it was only after her exclusion from the camp for seven days that she was allowed to return to her former soundness. The whole community felt the stroke, and remained in camp where it was till her restoration to them.

This incident took place at a spot known in our version as Hazeroth,—“The encampment,”—in the wilderness country of southern Palestine. Miriam’s name is not mentioned again till her death, which took place towards the close of the long desert life of the tribes. They were wandering, apparently, in the arid district south-east of the Dead Sea—the wilderness of Zin—when her end came. She was the first of the three illustrious ones to die, but she must have reached a good old age. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he laid aside all earthly cares at Nebo;¹ Aaron, a hundred and twenty-three when he died in Mount Hor;² and Miriam’s age, though not given, could hardly have been much less.³ The elder brother and sister passed away about the same time, for their deaths are both told in the same chapter,⁴ and Moses was left to finish his course alone.

“She was buried,” says Josephus, “on a mountain in Zin, and all the people mourned, in public lamentation for her, thirty days.” He adds that “she died on the first day of the month called Xanthicus,” nearly our April, so that she was laid among the spring flowers, before the burning heat of summer had come to try her once more. Traditions speak of her as the wife of Hur, and adds many legends of miracles wrought by her.

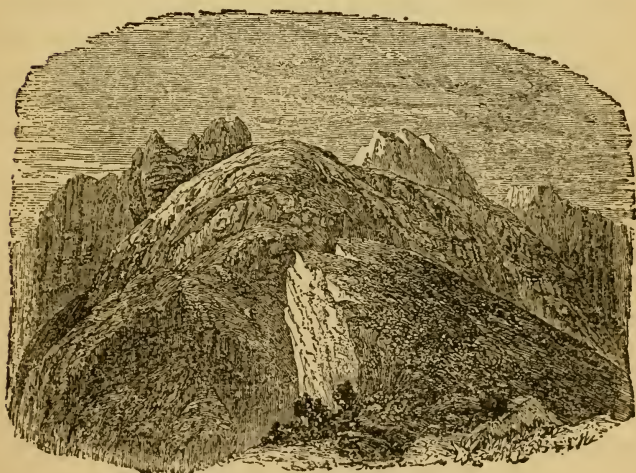
¹ Deut. xxxiv. 7.

² Num. xxxiii. 39.

³ Num. xx.

⁴ Josephus says she died in the end of the fortieth year of the wanderings, and that Aaron died in the same year (*Ant.*, IV. 4. 6.)

Of these Scripture says nothing, but it leaves us the noteworthy lesson that, even in those early ages, woman was held in high respect among the Hebrews. The day of her death was observed by the nation for ages, and the best evidence of her having merited an honour so great is found in her having been, first, the means of the rescue of Moses from Egyptian influences in his childhood, and, subsequently, in her life-long devotion to him, and her zeal in maintaining the worship of Jehovah among her own sex. The triumphal ode at the Exodus reveals a soul fitted to influence her sex, and shows that she used her grand position to do so for the noblest ends.



THE TOP OF SINAI.—*Laborde*



JOSHUA.

THE Exodus and the Forty Years' Wandering had demanded a Prophet to perform the signs and wonders of God, to receive and deliver to the people the Law, and to mould them, through long discipline, into a nation. The great work of conquest now before Israel required a soldier, and he appeared in the person of Joshua.

The successor of Moses was a descendant of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, in the twelfth generation. His father's name, we are told, was Nun; and a Jewish tradition makes Miriam, the sister of Moses, his mother. His family was one of the most famous in their great tribe, for he himself is expressly named as one of "the heads of the children of Israel,"¹ and his intimate relations with Moses, from the first, imply distinction of birth.

Born in Egypt, Joshua was about forty years old at the time of the Great Deliverance, in which he probably held a high command, for we find him appointed general of the forces of Israel at their encounter with the robber-hordes of Amalek, while the newly-escaped multitudes were still on the way to Mount Sinai. Even then his fitness for the future leader of the people must have

¹ Num. xiii. 8.

been seen by Moses, for the execution of the curse denounced on the fierce, lawless marauders, after they were driven off, was expressly left to him to carry out.¹ Cumbered as the Hebrews were, with women, children, and cattle, a sudden attack of the fierce outlaws of the desert had put everything in imminent peril, and it could have been no light task to drive them off with a hastily extemporized militia, to whom the use of arms must have been wholly new, and who had been long crushed and unmanned by slavery. But the stout heart of Joshua knew no fear. A simple, undaunted, straightforward soldier, he knew his duty and did it, and by his example, perhaps, as much as by his dispositions, hurled back the assailants. But his relations to Israel were very different from those of Moses, for while he fought, the victory was directly ascribed to the uplifted rod of the great Prophet, as the symbol of the resistless power of God.

Whether Joshua was attached to Moses before this eventful day, as his personal attendant, is not told us; but from this time he always appears in this character, as if brought into constant and confidential intercourse with the Head of the people, that he might be able, hereafter, to succeed him as its Leader. Henceforth his prospective dignity was foreshadowed by a change of name. Till the great day of the battle with Amalek he had been only Hosea—"Deliverance" or "Salvation;" henceforth he should be Joshua, or Jehoshuah—"The Salvation" or "Deliverance of Jehovah." The camp should see in him the great fact, and be reminded of it by the very change thus made in his name, that the deliverance on the day of Rephidim was not of man, but from above, and that in all the future glory

² Exod. xvii. 14.

of Israel human power was only the instrument of a higher. No name was ever so illustrious, for in a later age it passed, in a Greek form, into that which is above all others—the name JESUS.

At Sinai, Joshua was privileged, as the “minister” of Moses, to accompany him to the upper heights of the mountain,¹ leaving “the elders” of the people, and even Aaron and Hur, behind, and in these awful solitudes he waited for him till he returned from communion with God on the summit. It was on their beginning their descent together that the noise of the feasting and rejoicing in honour of the golden calf, rising into the stillness of the hills, broke on their ears. True to his character as a soldier, the first thought of Joshua is, that it was “the shouting of a battle;” but Moses, in as natural keeping with his peaceful turn, familiar with religious festivities, at once recognised that it was not the shout of victory, nor the wails of the conquered, but the voice of singing and mirth.²

When the law had been proclaimed, and the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of the nation settled in its leading features, steps were taken towards an immediate entrance into Palestine from the south. To prepare the way, twelve chiefs were selected, one from each tribe, to go as spies and bring back a report, after having personally examined the strength and weakness of the land.³ From the encampment in the wilderness of Et Tih, in the south, they went through the whole country to the far north, travelling, most likely, in separate parties, to avoid suspicion. The fertility even of the southern districts, now so barren, was then astonishing, for long mounds of pebbles, on which vines were wont to be trained, are still seen in places

¹ Exod. xxiv. 13.

² Exod. xxxii. 18.

³ Num. xiii. 1-16.

now utterly unproductive¹ through neglect of irrigation. At Eshcol, not far from the present Ain Kadis, the Kadesh Barnea of the Book of Numbers, they ventured, as they were so near safety again, to cut a cluster from one of the vineyards, as a sample of the fertility of the land, of which it was a convincing proof, for it had to be carried on a pole, between two, to prevent its being crushed.

But the strength of the country, the fierceness of the inhabitants, the towns of the Amorites on the tops of the hills, "walled," as it seemed, "up to heaven," the iron chariots and cavalry of the Canaanites of the coast and inland valleys, and the haughty bearing of the Amalekites of the central highlands, had overawed nearly all the exploring party. Two only, Caleb and Joshua,² retained their self-possession and confidence, and the faint-heartedness of the emissaries struck terror into the people at large. Israel was, as yet, unequal to the task of the conquest of Palestine.

For nearly forty years we hear no more of Joshua, except the one incident—still marking his soldier-like spirit of discipline—of his indignation at Eldad and Medad,³ presuming to "prophecy" without special authorization from Moses. He had no idea of any one acting in a public capacity except under orders.

The close of the wanderings saw Joshua and Caleb the sole survivors of their generation. Moses was about to be taken, and Miriam and Aaron were already dead. It was necessary that Joshua should be formally consecrated to the Leadership for which he had been so long marked out,⁴ and for this end the people were

¹ *Palestine Fund Reports*, 1870, p. 23.

² Num. xiv. 6-9, 24.

³ Num. xi. 28, 29.

⁴ He was to be the Duke ("dux," leader), or, as would be said

called to a solemn assembly; Eleazar, the High Priest in succession to Aaron, set him apart by laying his hands on his head; and Moses commended him to the congregation, and gave him special counsels in their hearing.¹ No more legislation was needed; Moses himself had framed the laws of the future nation, and the special want now was a brave and skilful soldier to lead it triumphantly into the land which was to be its permanent home. No maxims of statecraft were impressed on him; one, which suited his simple warrior-nature, was enough. "Ye shall not fear: for the Lord your God He shall fight for you."² "Be strong and of a good courage."³

After the miraculous passage of the Jordan, Joshua's first step was to make a fortified camp at Gilgal, on the hills above Jericho, as his future centre of operations. The generation that had died in the wilderness had been fickle and unreliable, but their children, now at last on the soil of the land which, though theirs by Divine gift, had to be won by the sword, were resolute and trustworthy. To kindle a still stronger enthusiasm, however, was all important, for religious zeal was the one impulse sufficient to ensure victory in the task before them. Although eighty-five years of age, their leader was as full of fire as a young man. Spear in hand⁴ or slung at his back,⁵ he was present everywhere. Now, the camp was engrossed by the erection of a circle of huge stones taken from the Jordan, as a memorial of the crossing; sacrifices on an altar with-

in German, the "Herzog" (literally, leader of an army), the equivalent of our "Duke."

¹ Num. xxvii. 23; Deut. xxxi. 14, 23.

² Deut. iii. 22.

³ Deut. xxxi. 23.

⁴ Josh. viii. 18, 26.

⁵ 1 Sam. xvii. 6.

the circumference probably adding additional sacredness to the incident. The next day, the long neglected rite of circumcision, sacred even among the Egyptians and Canaanites, but a special sign among the Hebrews of their covenant relation to Jehovah as His chosen people, was once more honoured throughout the congregation; and a few days later, the remembrance of the mighty deliverance of their fathers was kindled to a burning zeal for the task before themselves, by the celebration of the Passover, amidst great rejoicings, for the first time since leaving Sinai, nearly forty years before. To heighten the enthusiasm, the long-continued supply of manna suddenly ceased on the day after the festival; the wheat of Canaan henceforth taking its place. The past was ended; a new era was before them. Even Joshua was not without his special excitement to zealous earnestness. While the border city of Jericho, the key of Palestine on the east, was yet unattacked, a Divine vision was vouchsafed to him. "A man stood over against him with his sword drawn in his hand," and when accosted by Joshua with his instinctive fearlessness, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" announced that he had come as prince of the host of Jehovah, before whom their human leader was to "loose the shoe from off his foot,"¹ as on holy ground.

Jericho being taken, by the aid of a miracle, acting, it may be, through an earthquake, the Hebrews were free to begin the conquest of the country, without dreading an attack on their rear. Three different campaigns brought the enterprise to a triumphant conclusion. Central Palestine was taken by an invasion to the north-west, in which Ai, Bethel, and Gibeon fell

¹ Josh. v. 13-15.

into the hands of Joshua. The chiefs of the different tribes and races, alarmed at the fall of Jericho and Ai, formed an alliance to drive back the enemy. Adonizedek—"The just lord"—"king" of Jerusalem; Hoham, "king" of Hebron, in the south; Piram—"The invincible,"—"king" of Jarmuth, on the slopes of the Judæan hills, behind Ashdod; Japhia—"The splendid,"—"king" of Lachish, on the edge of the south country, behind Gaza; and Debir—"The oracle,"—"king" of Eglon, about ten miles west from Lachish, joined with the five "kings"¹ of the Amorites, on the central hills of Judæa and Ephraim, to resist the threatened attack. The battle took place at Gibeon, among the steep, bare hills, and resulted in a great victory for Joshua, who drove the enemy in headlong rout down the two narrow and precipitous passes of Beth-horon, a little north-west of Jerusalem, and by miraculous aid dispersed and crushed them utterly. A rapid march to the south overcame all scattered hostility, and, henceforth, Central Palestine, with the exception of Jerusalem, was permanently in the hands of Israel.

A campaign in the north followed, and here again Joshua conquered, for not even the cavalry and chariots of the Phœnicians could withstand the fierce onslaught and enthusiasm of his forces. A final march and a last battle, at Hebron, with the remnants of the gigantic aboriginal races, completed the great conquest, at least so far that the Hebrews had space enough to settle quietly in their new territory.

The last years of Joshua were passed in well-deserved rest at Timnath-serah, in his own Ephraim. A solemn assembly of the people, called at Shechem, renewed

¹ The sheik of a petty Arab encampment still bears the name "Melek," translated "king" in our version.

the national covenant of fidelity to Jehovah, and the work of dividing the country into portions for each tribe followed.

It is a striking sign of the personal influence of Joshua, that during his lifetime there was no attempt at resisting his authority, or even at forsaking the worship of Jehovah for that of idols, which, however, soon began after his death. His last public act had been an attempt to pledge them to lasting fidelity to Jehovah, and he died and was buried in his own town, in the fond belief that his people would continue in the path marked out for them by Moses and himself.

Joshua is one of the few characters in history disfigured by no stain. He realized the ideal of a devout warrior; stern when duty required, but tender where possible, and always loyal to his conscience and his God. He had been taught to command in age by serving in youth; and he earned, by manly vigour and fearlessness, an honoured rest for his later years. Israel could have had no leader more fitted for her wants at the time. Fearless, simple, reverent, he had no higher conception than duty. Like Moses, he did not transmit his power to his family, though he had no such reason as that of Moses, whose children, as Jewish only on their father's side, might have been rejected by a nation so exclusive.

In his old age his position must have been lonely in the extreme, for he was the last survivor, by many years, of the vast host who had escaped from Egypt. He lived to the age of a hundred and ten, the patriarch of his race, and at last passed away leaving a name held in everlasting honour.



J AEL.

JAEL,—“The mountain goat,”—the wife of Heber, the Kenite, is celebrated in the Song of Deborah for the deliverance she wrought to Israel, in a time of its greatest need, by killing Sisera, the general of the king of Hazor, who had long oppressed the country. To understand the impulse which prompted this fidelity to tribal alliance and friendship, at the cost of the worst faithlessness to her victim, it is necessary to recall the earlier notices of the clan to which she belonged.

The first mention of the Kenites occurs in the promise given to Abraham that his descendants should obtain possession of Canaan—the land of various enumerated tribes—among whom the Kenites are included.¹ Their exact origin is unknown, but alliances made at a later time with the Midianites, who sprang from Keturah and Abraham,² incorporated them with that nation as one of its branches.

In the days of Moses—nearly seven hundred years after Abraham—the Kenites seem to have wandered into the peninsula of Sinai; for Jethro, who befriended the future deliverer of Israel and afterwards became his father-in-law, is described as priest of Midian,³ and

¹ Gen. xv. 19.

² Gen. xxv. 2.

³ Exod. ii. 16.

also as a Kenite.¹ The tribe was thus connected with Israel by the double bond of common descent from Abraham, and by its relation to Moses, their national hero.

This connection, however, might have been forgotten, but for the friendly bearing of Hobab, the son of Jethro, to Israel, during its wanderings in the wilderness. Unaccustomed to nomadic life, the hosts till so recently settled in Egypt, were ill fitted to set out from Sinai, across the barren uplands which led to Canaan, without the help of guides to whom the desert was familiar. An overture was, therefore, made by Moses to Hobab, to leave his camping ground at Sinai, and accompany Israel on its march through the wilderness, as its guide to the best pasture grounds; and to the various wells, so necessary for such a multitude.² To an Arab one stretch of the desert is as much a home as another, and the promise that what goodness Jehovah should do to Israel would be shown by it to him and his people, won him to join the Hebrew tribes, and to continue henceforth with them, in the useful service requested.

Hobab and his clan seem to have taken part in the storming of Jericho,—“the city of palm-trees,”—but they had throughout kept themselves distinct from the Hebrews. Their tents had even attracted the notice of Balaam,³ and they themselves had been the subject of a special allusion: “Their dwelling-place (in the wild gorges of Sinai) had been strong, and their nest had been in the rocks; but they would in the end be wasted, and Assyria would carry them away captive.” The fate of Israel was one day to overwhelm them also!

¹ Judg. i. 16; iv. 11, 17.

² Num. x. 29.

³ Num. xxiv. 21.

When Jericho had fallen, the Kenites withdrew from a mode of life no longer congenial to them, and betook themselves, with Judah, to the free air of the wilderness reaching away to the south and west of the conquered city. Judah, as yet, had to gain a footing in the richer parts of its future territory, and for the time had to content itself with the stony uplands of the Negeb. Here the Kenites lived in intercourse so cordial with the Lion tribe, that, many centuries after, they were still inscribed in the lists of the descendants of Judah, as if counted among them.¹ Some, laying aside their nomadic habits, became, indeed, actually incorporated with Israel, and devoted themselves to the learned profession of scribes,² with their head-quarters at a village called Jabez, apparently near Bethlehem. In some unknown way they even seem to have become connected with Boaz, the grandfather of David.

But the bulk of the clan remained true to their Arab tastes, and preferred a roaming life among the wild tribes of the south. Even there, however, they retained a kindly place in the memory of the Israelites, for, four hundred years after the taking of Jericho, we find Saul sending a friendly message to them to remove their tents from among those of the Amalekites, against whom he was about to conduct a force;³ and David distributed part of the spoil of these desert robbers among them, when, at a later time, he well nigh destroyed the marauders.⁴

The last notice of these southern Kenites is striking. Five hundred years after David, Jerusalem was in sore straits, and about to fall before the arms of Nebuchadnezzar. The faithful Kenites, unwilling to let their

¹ Judg. i. 16.

² 1 Chron. ii. 55.

³ 1 Sam. xv. 6.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxx. 29.

ancient ally and kindred blood perish without assistance, left their deserts, and threw themselves into the imperilled city, whose fate they doubtless shared, by being carried off with Judah and Benjamin to Babylon.

By a strange vow or rule introduced by the head of this part of the clan the use of wine or strong drink of any kind had been prohibited. True to their Bedouin instincts they were, further, required to build no houses, and neither to sow nor plant vineyards, and they had kept this so faithfully, and had been so loyal to Jerusalem, that Jeremiah pronounced a blessing on them:¹ "Jonadab the son of Rechab"—"The rider"—"shall not want a man to stand before God for ever."

Strange to say, Wolff, the missionary, in our own days, affirmed that he met a tribe of Arabs numbering ten thousand, who told him that they were descendants of this very Jonadab.

But, besides these southern Kenites, there was another branch which moved from Sinai to the north of Palestine, and pitched their tents under "the Oaks of the strangers," near Kadesh-naphtali, on the green hills overlooking El Huleh, or Merom. The sheik of this encampment was Heber, and his chief wife, the Jael whose name stands at the head of this chapter.

The times were very troubled when Heber came to these parts. Jabin, the Canaanite king of Hazor, a district south of El Huleh and west of the upper end of the Lake of Galilee, had overcome the northern tribes, and kept them in cruel subjection by the help of a strong force of iron chariots.² He was but a petty dignitary, however, and Heber was strong enough, as head of a clan, to make an alliance with him, securing his own quiet by a promise of neutrality. This he had,

¹ Jer. xxxv. 19.

² Judg. iv. 3.

hitherto, faithfully and not unselfishly kept. But the heart of Jael, at least, had yearned to do something to help the immemorial friends of her people, now so crushed and broken.

The rout of Sisera by Barak—"The lightning"—and Deborah—"The bee"—brought her an opportunity. The flood of the Kishon had converted Esdraelon, in part, into a vast quagmire, in which the chariots of the Canaanites could neither advance nor retreat; and the fierce attack of the Israelites, while the confusion was at its height, threw the whole force into panic and headlong ruin and flight. Sisera, urging his chariot to the fastest, fled homewards. But the chase after him was so hot that, ere long, he sought greater safety by alighting, and turned aside, on foot, up the side glens of the hills.

No hiding-place offered, however, till he was far north of his home, and then, at last, the tents of Heber, the ally of his master, appeared in sight.

However we may admire the feeling from which Jael acted in what followed, it is impossible, with the higher morality of Jesus Christ as our standard, not to condemn the deceit and falsehood by which she effected her purpose.

The tents of the women in an Arab encampment are inviolable by man under any circumstances. Sisera, worn out and utterly exhausted though he was, would not have dreamed of entering one, and, unfortunately, as it seemed, Heber was not at hand. But Jael, with hateful duplicity, was ready to overcome the weary man's scruples.

Going out of her tent she hurried to meet him, and pressed him, with repeated invitations, to take refuge in it. No one would think of seeking him there.

Induced at last by her urgency, he went in, and then, with a heightened treachery, she pretended to hide him under a cloak or cloth. The fever of long-continued over-exertion would not, however, let the fugitive sleep. "Would she kindly add to her many favours that of a draught of water, for he was very thirsty?" But water was not good enough. She would give him something better. So she opened a leather skin of curdled milk, the favourite drink of the Arab, and gave him a draught in the finest bowl in her tent; covering him carefully when he had finished, doubtless with many counsels to sleep soundly, and many assurances of his perfect safety. The drink she had given him is a strong narcotic, and would soon make him helpless in deep slumber.

Still he could not sleep till he had made a final provision for his safety. The terror of the battle was still on him. "Would she kindly stand in the door of the tent, and if any man came asking if there were a man within, would she be so good as save his life by saying there was not?" Jael was ready to promise this also, and then, at last, the tired soldier sank into a profound sleep.

It was impossible for any one to have pledged herself more sacredly to protect another than Jael had done to Sisera. To let him enter her tent at all was a solemn guarantee of protection, and every addition of act and word had been given besides, that he might perfectly trust her.

Yet he was no sooner in a deep drowse than the hideous treachery she intended had full play. Taking one of the long, sharp, wooden pins sunk in the earth to hold the ropes of the tent, and lifting the heavy mallet with which they were commonly driven home,

she crept up to the sleeping man, and with one terrible blow, drove the pin clear into his skull at the temples. He had only strength to make a convulsive bound, and fell dead at her feet. But she was not contented till assurance was doubly sure, and with repeated blows drove the huge pin quite through the head, and fastened it into the earth.¹

It is easy to fancy that the women of Israel would see only the deliverance which the deed of Jael had brought them, and would, as Deborah said, praise her in their tents above all the women of her day; but the morality of her act was not the less hateful. What the result may have been of such a flagrant outrage on Heber's ally, Jabin of Hazor, and on all the laws of Arab hospitality and common fidelity, is not related. It is noticeable, however, that while the southern part of the clan is mentioned over and over again in the story of Israel, the northern disappears.

The temporary alliance, from expediency alone, had lasted while no strain had tried it, but in the hour when it was needed most it gave way, before the traditional friendship of centuries and the ties of common descent. The end was noble enough; the means brave to a marvel; but the heart that could have planned and carried them out was anything rather than that of a woman.

¹ Judg. iv. 18-21.





DEBORAH.

TWENTY-FIVE years after his triumphant passage of the Jordan, Joshua was laid to rest in his own town of Timnath-serah,—“The remaining portion,”—among the hills twenty miles north-west of Jerusalem, in the territory of his own tribe, Ephraim. The spell of his grand integrity and simple zeal for Jehovah had kept Israel to a worthy standard of public life and religious profession while he remained among them, and a similar healthful influence passed, after his death, to the chiefs of the different tribes who had been associated with him. In the simple words of the writer of the Book of Joshua, “The people served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of Jehovah, that He did for Israel.”

No provision for the common government or political union of the tribes had, however, been made, and each became an independent clan after Joshua's death. The central hill-district of Canaan had been wrested from the native populations, but Israel was still hemmed in by them on every side, and had before it a long period of confusion and struggle before they could be driven back sufficiently to give full room to the invaders. It was the earlier counterpart of the Saxon

conquest of England—separate tribes carrying on local wars against the stubborn resistance of the original races, through a long course of successive generations.

Joshua's conquest had broken their power for a time, but the dissolution of the Hebrew confederacy at his death had given them new hopes, and the whole land burst out into fierce attempts to regain its former position. Judah had to fight the Canaanite in the hill country, in the Negeb, or southern district, and in the Shephelah, or sea-coast plain. Hebron, and Debir—"The city of the scribes,"—on the ridge four or five miles to the west of it, had to be taken once more. Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, in the Philistine plain, were wrested from the Canaanites, for the warlike Philistines had not yet risen to their future power, though they had been in the land since before the days of Isaac. But only the hill country could be retained; for the iron chariots of the old races scoured the lowlands, and constantly drove back the Hebrews. Jerusalem was taken by Judah and Benjamin, but the Jebusites still remained in it, and ere long wrested it from the conquerors, and kept it for more than four hundred years, till the time of David. The tribe of Ephraim had to fight against Bethel once more; and, north of them, in the future territory of Samaria, the half tribe of Manasseh could not drive out the Canaanites from the rich valley of Bethshean on the Jordan, nor from Dor, in the plain of Sharon, on the sea-coast, nor from Taanach, Megiddo, and Ibleam, which shut them out from the magnificent plain of Esdraelon. On the south of their territory, moreover, they were forced to leave Gezer, overhanging the Philistine plain, in the hands of the enemy. On the north edge of Esdraelon, Sephoris, resting like "a bird," on its hill, successfully

resisted Zebulun, and Asher wholly failed to drive out the Canaanites from Acre, Zidon, and other towns and cities on the northern sea-coast plain, or near it. East of Asher, Naphtali was equally powerless to gain complete possession of the bounds assigned it, in anticipation, by Joshua. Beth-shemesh—the town of the “Temple of the Sun”—Beth-anath—that of the “Temple of the Oracle”—continued mainly Canaanite. Dan, on the south of Ephraim and west of Benjamin, was even more unsuccessful, for the Amorites kept possession of the fertile valleys, and forced them to content themselves with the hilly pastures. Everywhere Israel shared its land with the original tribes, and succeeded only after centuries in forcing them even to pay tribute.

The result of this intermixture with heathenism was a speedy decline in the worship of Jehovah. The attractions of idolatry were irresistible to a rude people like the Hebrews of those ages, especially when associated with the temptations of a grossly sensual faith. The early zeal and purity of the nation gave way to the corruption around them, and their division into independent tribes conspired with this religious degeneracy, to make them an easy prey to the constant efforts of the Canaanites and others to overcome them.

Two hundred years of this wild confusion and trouble had passed, only to find matters, if possible, worse than ever. A confederacy of the Canaanites under Jabin—“The clear-headed”—king of Hazor, a town on the hills, a few miles north of Nazareth, and west of Capernaum, had for a time utterly crushed the northern tribes. His general, Sisera—“The warrior”—lived among the hills, twenty miles to the north, in the town of Harosheth—“The carver’s and mason’s town”—and

had under him, besides other forces, no fewer than nine hundred of the iron chariots so much dreaded by Israel. Awed by such power, it lay helpless, in these northern parts, for twenty years, under the bitterest oppression.

But while the men of the nation had lost hope and heart, a brave woman who passed, through the land, as a prophetess, and was accepted by multitudes as judge in civil and criminal matters, had kept both. Her name was Deborah—"The bee"—a matron, wife of one Lapidoth—"The torch"—of the tribe of Ephraim. Her home was in the uplands between Ramah and Bethel, a little way north of Jerusalem, and there she held a solemn tribunal, from time to time, under a well-known palm-tree, "and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment" in their causes.

A hundred miles to the north, in the centre of the oppressed district, in the town of Kedesh, in Naphtali, close to Lake Merom, lived one whom she resolved to make the instrument of the deliverance of the subject tribes. His name Barak—"The lightning"—was of Canaanite origin, and appears again in that of Hamilcar *Barkas*, the great father of the still greater Hannibal. He was the son of one who bore a Hebrew name, Abinoam—"The gracious father"—but the times showed themselves in his own name, borrowed from the alien.

The heroic Deborah looked to Barak as the leader in the rising she contemplated. Sending to him, as if to one from whom she expected compliance, she announced that Jehovah had commanded him, through her, to summon a force of ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun, the oppressed tribes, to meet him on the broad top of Mount Tabor, overhanging Esdraelon, on the north-east, and promised that on his doing so He would deliver Sisera, with all his dreaded chariots, into his

hands. But Barak had not the greatness of soul of Deborah, and would not stir unless she joined him. Hurrying to the north she was with him forthwith.

At the news of the revolt, Sisera was instantly afoot and covered Esdraelon, the one fitting battle-field of Palestine, with his terrible array. A river called Kishon—"The winding"—dry, for most of its course, in summer, swells in winter and after the rains, into a torrent, and gathering into one channel the rush of waters from all the side valleys of the Nazareth hills and the Carmel range, north and south, pours in a deep stream, for the time, to the sea. After sudden rain-storms it flows with so fierce and strong a current, that a few hours convert dry ravines into impassable floods, and the whole ground in some parts becomes a morass, impracticable even for single travellers. What was firm soil becomes presently quicksands, full of danger to man and beast.

A sudden storm sweeping from the sea was the sign to Deborah that the moment for the great attempt had come. Her genius saw the chance it gave of paralysing Sisera by making the plain useless for chariots, and of cutting him off by its destroying his power to retreat. Rousing Barak to action, the Hebrews rushed down unexpectedly on their enemy, with the promised result. Surprised and thrown into confusion, the very size of Sisera's army was its ruin. Nothing remained but flight, and yet that was ruinous. As in the battle of Tabor in 1799 the fugitive Turks were drowned in great numbers in the swollen torrents, so Sisera's forces, panic-struck, thrown into helpless disorder, and driven pell-mell into the flooded streams and shaking quagmires, were utterly routed and ruined.

Sisera, broken and lost, fled with the wreck of his chariots through the passes of the hills to the north, towards Harosheth, his home and head-quarters. But Barak—"lightning" like—pressed so closely behind, that at last his foe had to flee afoot for his life. Turning eastwards from the road, he made for the tents of Heber, the Kenite, a descendant of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who had left Sinai to settle in Palestine, a few miles from Jabin's town, Hazor. There was peace by a formal treaty, as was wont, between Heber and Jabin, so that Sisera had a right to expect shelter and safety. Between two clans at peace there was strict mutual fidelity, except in the rarest cases, for treachery to the oath of alliance was abhorrent to the feelings of the age.

But the times were out of joint, and if Heber were friendly with Jabin from policy, he was still more so to Israel from ancient tribal connections. Coming to the welcome tents, Sisera made for that of Jael, Heber's wife, thinking he would be safest in the tent of a woman, which no man would be thought to have entered. The result we have already seen.

That Jael should thus have betrayed Sisera, and that Deborah should have praised her act, are characteristics of the barbarous age in which they lived. An enemy was, in those days, no more than the wild beast that wastes a land, and to snare him by deceit was thought as little amiss as to prepare a pitfall for a wolf, or to spread tempting bait to lure it to its death. Christianity was then thirteen hundred years in the future.

The victory was not left unsung. Deborah was skilled in the poetic utterance that has in all ages marked prophets and prophetesses, and has left us a song of triumph which is one of the earliest composi-

tions of the kind in existence. I submit the following as a close translation :—

That the chiefs of Israel led (forth to the fight),
That the people freely gave themselves (to battle);
Praise be to Jehovah !

Hear, ye kings ; ye princes, give ear.
I will sing, I will sing to Jehovah ;
I will strike the lyre to Jehovah, the God of Israel !

Jehovah ! when Thou wentest forth from Scir,
When Thou marchedst hither from the land of Edom,
The earth trembled, the heavens were darkened in storm,
The clouds poured down their waters !
The mountains shook before Jehovah,
Even Sinai itself, before Jehovah, the God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,—
In the days of Jael,—the highways were untrodden,
Men stole on their way by secret by-paths ;
Rule ceased in Israel ; it ceased,
Till I, Deborah, arose,
Till I arose, a mother in Israel.

Israel (forsaking Jehovah) chose new gods ;
Then war stormed at her gates :
Not a shield was seen, or a spear,
In forty thousand of Israel.

My heart is towards the rulers of Israel :
Towards the sons of the people who came forth freely !
Praise be to Jehovah !

Sing, ye (nobles) that ride on white she-asses ;
Ye (rich) who sit upon carpets,
Ye (poor) that walk on the highways.
Sing louder than they that divide the spoil
By the watering-troughs of the flocks ;
Rehearse ye the righteousness of Jehovah,
The righteous acts of His rule in Israel !
For the people of Jehovah went down to the gates (of their
enemies) !

Awake ! awake ! Deborah,
Awake ! awake ! give forth a song !
Arise, Barak ! Lead away thy captives, thou son of Abinoam !
The remnant of Israel went forth to battle—leaders and
people—
To me (Deborah) amidst the mighty ones, did Jehovah (Him-
self) come forth.

(They come)—a band from Ephraim—the tribe rooted in the
hills of Amalek—

With them, among their people, came Benjamin ;
From Manasseh, sons of Machir, leaders of men, came forth ;
From Zebulun, heroes bearing the staves of chieftains ;
The chiefs of Issachar came, with Deborah ;
With Issachar, also, came Barak ;—
They rushed afoot (to the battle) in the valley (of Kishon).

By the brooks of Reuben
Were great assemblies and consultations.
Why didst thou stay (in safety) amidst thy folds
To listen to the flutes of the shepherds ?
By the brooks of Reuben
Were great assemblies and consultations !
Gad lingered in Gilead, on the far side of Jordan ;
And why tarried Dan (on the coast) by his ships ?
Asher lingered on the sea-shore
And would not leave his harbours !

The people of Zebulun scorned their lives, even to the death,
Naphtali, theirs, on the heights of the field !

The kings came ; they fought :
The kings of Canaan fought
At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.

Not a single piece of silver was their booty,¹
(The hosts of God) fought for us from heaven ;
The stars, from their paths, fought against Sisera ;
The river Kishon swept the enemy away !
A stream of ancient fame is the river Kishon !

¹ The booty of the Canaanites.

Sing on, my soul, with power!

There, stamped the hoofs of the horses as they fled,
When the mighty ones were chased afar!

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of Jehovah,
Curse ye bitterly her inhabitants,
For they came not out to the help of Jehovah,
To the help of Jehovah against the mighty ones!

Blessed above women, Jael,
Wife of Heber, the Kenite,
Blessed above women in the tent!

He asked water: she gave him new milk;
She brought him curdled milk in a princely bowl;
She stretched out her hand to the tent-pin,
Her right hand to the workman's hammer:
She smote through and through; she pierced through his
temples—

At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay—
At her feet he fell, he lay—
Where he bowed, there he lay, dead!

The mother of Sisera kept looking out from her window,
And calling aloud through the lattice—

“Why tarries his chariot's coming?
Why tarry the wheels of the chariots with him?”

The wisest of her maidens answer her,
But she still repeats to herself the words.

“How could they return so soon,” (said the maidens),

“Have they not found much spoil?

And are they not staying to divide it?

A maiden, ay, perchance, two for each man!

For Sisera, booty of brightly-dyed cloths,

Booty of many-coloured robes!

Rich scarves for the neck of Sisera's wife!”

So perish all thine enemies, Jehovah!

But let those that love Thee

Be as the sun going forth in his strength!



GIDEON.

THE long and troubled times of the Judges, extending, at the lowest computation, over more than three hundred years, had been brightened for a while by the rise of Deborah and the moral and material results of her great victory over Sisera. For forty years after the overthrow of the Canaanites on that momentous day the land had rest.

But it is the inevitable result of the division of a country into petty independent governments, that the weakness induced exposes it to easy invasion and conquest. Palestine, which is only about the size of Wales, and was still largely held by the former inhabitants, was subdivided by the Hebrews into many tribal governments, as England in the Saxon period was broken up into Essex, Wessex, Mercia, Kent, Sussex, and several other kingdoms; and was, hence, in constant danger of inroad and subjugation. To the nomadic tribes of the desert, which stretched to the borders of the land on the east and south, the valleys of Gilead and Bashan, and the fertile plains of Central Canaan, were an irresistible temptation, stretching out as they did like paradises of green, before eyes wearied with the yellow sand or dry barrenness of the wilder-

ness. Israel itself, when only so many wandering tribes, had forced a way into these oases, and had held them, and there seemed no reason why other races should not, like them, exchange the desert for a home so fair, at least during the summer and harvest of each year, by overpowering Israel in turn.

The forty years' rest after Deborah's triumph was rudely broken by inroads excited in this hope. A great confederation of the Arab tribes, like that which, at an earlier day, had given the Shepherd Kings to Egypt, poured into Palestine. Midianites, Amalekites, and all "the children of the east," far and near, in countless numbers, with immense trains of camels, and of cattle, and flocks, streamed up the steep wadys from the fords of Jordan, and swept all resistance before them, from Esdraelon, on the north, to Gaza, on the extreme south. No sooner had the fields been sown each year, than these wild hordes reappeared, covering the hill pastures and the fertile valleys, in turn, with their tents; driving off every sheep, or goat, or ox, or ass, they could find, and seizing all hoards of grain they could discover, saved from the few fields that had escaped destruction by their endless flocks and herds. No visitation could be more terrible, for there was neither food nor live stock left in the land. Fire and sword spread terror on every side; desperate resistance by isolated bands of Hebrews only led to the massacre of these brave defenders of their homes, and at last safety and even existence seemed possible only by the population taking refuge in the numerous caves of the hills, and in strongholds on hill tops.

Among the sufferers in these evil days, however, was one whom a long training in desultory resistance was gradually fitting, under God, to be the deliverer of his

nation. He had suffered bitterly in the forays of the past years, for a number of his family, men noble and commanding in stature, as he himself was, had perished at Tabor, in conflict with the invaders.¹ He was a cadet of an insignificant "thousand" or "family" of Manasseh, but his bravery had already made him known as a hero well worthy of his name—Gideon—"The fierce warrior." Ophrah, his home, lay in the hills of Central Palestine, in the very midst of the district most affected by the Arab forays, and there, amidst the wide-spread religious degeneracy of his people, he bore himself no less manfully as a faithful servant of Jehovah than as a fearless champion of liberty. Others might trace the public calamities to what causes they liked, he felt that they came from Jehovah having forsaken Israel, for its sins. From his first appearance to his last, he is never ashamed to own his loyalty to the God of his fathers.

When the times were darkest, the hearts of the people were once more stirred to religious earnestness, by the rise of a prophet who thus fearlessly ascribed their sufferings to their having apostatized from their own faith, to serve the gods of the Amorites—the hill tribes more immediately in contact with the Hebrews. It was the first muttering of a storm of revived popular zeal, which was ere long, under the wise guidance of Gideon, to burst, and overwhelm the invader.

Autumn of the seventh year of the Bedouin inroads had come, when a Divine call summoned Gideon to head his countrymen against the enemy. He was threshing wheat on the floor of one of the many wine-presses hewn out of the sides of the hills, for he could not do so in the open fields, as he otherwise would, for

¹ Judges viii. 18.

fear of the Arab plunderers. A terebinth tree at hand offered him a grateful shade from the hot sun. Suddenly Gideon became aware of the presence of one who, by the staff in his hand, might have been mistaken for an ordinary traveller. It was no other, however, than "the Angel of Jehovah," come to Gideon as He had to Moses, and Joshua, and the patriarchs. The hero was forthwith to go in the night then granted him, and save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. With the diffidence of a noble nature, however, Gideon shrank from assuming such a task. "His family was poor in Manasseh, and he was the least in his father's house." But a heavenly sign presently awed him into submission. The food he brought, in accordance with Eastern hospitality, was consumed by fire springing from the rock at the touch of the angel's staff. Awed at the sight, he could think only of the anger of Jehovah so visibly shown around, and expected presently to die. But God had come in mercy, and calmed his fears. It was the dawn of hope for Israel, and was fitly recognised by Gideon's building an altar on the spot, with the fitting name, "Jehovah is (once more) peace."

That night a second revelation was granted, imposing a new command. The religious zeal which alone could secure support to Gideon among the people, in his war of deliverance, demanded a public protest against the idolatry into which the natives had fallen, to rouse better feelings through the land. Joash, Gideon's father, had adopted the idolatrous practices of the nation at large, and, in sinful despair of help from Jehovah, had built, on the summit of the rock on which his sept had entrenched themselves, an altar of Baal, the Sun-god of his Canaanite neighbours. Along-

side of it, seen far and near, stood a huge Asherah,¹ or symbol of Ashtoreth the consort of Baal; apparently the rough stem of a tree. Two oxen of Joash were that night to be taken to drag down the altar; the idolatrous Asherah was to be cut down; an altar built to Jehovah, and one of the oxen offered as a burnt-sacrifice to Him; the sacred Asherah supplying the needed fuel. With the quick decision that marks a strong mind, the command was obeyed in the darkness

of that very night, for Gideon dared not brave the superstition of the people by day. Morning broke to find the altar of Baal gone, and the hill-top bare. The sacrilege was presently traced to Gideon, and he would have been put to death by the terrified votaries of the idol, but for the quick wit of his father, who advised them to leave Baal to avenge the dishonour for himself, if he were really a god. To have dared to brave a god made Gideon forthwith a hero.

He was Jerubbaal, — “He

who fights against Baal,” — and, as such, conspicuously the leader in any future national action.

The first great act in his life thus happily ended, the way lay open for the next part of the Divine task appointed, Yet its greatness for the moment dismayed even Gideon. Deliberate and thoughtful before acting,

¹ “Grove” in the Authorized Version.



PUNIC IDOL WITH A VOTIVE TABLET.

though intense and energetic when the moment came for being so, he shrank from attempting open war against the vast hordes of the invaders, with no support but that of the few among his people whom oppression had still failed utterly to dispirit. A heroic impulse which he felt to be Divine had impelled him to sound the war-trumpet, and it was caught up and repeated through Northern Palestine, till not only his own sept—the clan of Abiezer, but all Manasseh, with the fiery warriors of Zebulun and Naphtali, whose fathers had fought so bravely under Barak, and even Asher, so faint-hearted forty years before, gathered to his standard. Yet, was it possible even with their help, to meet such an army as that which lay, far and near, in their tents, over the ruined land? Fresh “signs” from God nerved Gideon to the supreme effort.

The Arab hosts lay encamped in the wide plain of Esdraelon, with the careless security which often marks Eastern armies. For seven years they had trodden the land as conquerors, and trusted to their having crushed it beyond the power of resistance. Meanwhile, thirty-two thousand men had assembled at the rendezvous of Gideon, near “The spring of trembling,” at the eastern end of Esdraelon. But their very numbers were like to prove their weakness, for they were undisciplined and unorganized. Besides, victory by such a multitude might tempt Israel to vaunt of it as due to themselves, without fitting recognition of the hand of God. The timid were, therefore, warned to return home, and it marks the depression of the times that twenty-two thousand availed themselves of the permission. Even ten thousand, however, were too many. The victory was to be gained by a sudden midnight surprise, for which only the coolest and most deliberate were fitted.

Taking his host, therefore, to "The spring of trembling"—called so, can we doubt, from the terror of so critical a moment—he chose only such as were too earnest and zealous to bend down to drink at their ease, but contented themselves with lifting water in their hand, as if afraid to be a moment off their guard. No more than three hundred men did so, and all the rest were for the time dismissed to their tents.

A stratagem often used in ancient warfare was now arranged. Dividing the band of heroes into three companies, Gideon gave each man a trumpet, an empty earthen pitcher, and a lamp, to be concealed in the pitcher till the right moment. He had been encouraged by an incident of the previous night. Gliding in the darkness into the camp of the Bedouins, like our own Alfred into that of the Danes, he had heard a Midianite predicting, from a dream he had had, the destruction of the host, and his own name had been mentioned as the leader they dreaded.

Sending the three companies of a hundred each, by secret paths over the hills, out of sight from the plain, he directed them to lie hidden till they heard the blast of his own trumpet. They were then, each, to blow a wild blast, to break the pitchers and expose the lights, and to rush forward on the enemy, thus rudely waked from careless sleep, to the cry of "The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon!"

The plan, able in its conception, and carried out with bright intelligence and resolution by Gideon, succeeded perfectly. The vast host, seized with panic, thought only of flight, by the fords of the Jordan, to the security of the desert. But Gideon, reinforced by the ten thousand, gave them no rest. The first great victory on Esdraelon was followed by a second at the Jordan

fords, where levies from Ephraim, hurriedly summoned, cut off the passage of the fugitives, and slew two of their leading chiefs, "The Raven" and "The Wolf"—fit names for Bedouin robbers. A passing outbreak of jealousy on the part of the great central tribe was meanwhile allayed by a politic answer of Gideon, which showed his skill in managing men. Forthwith, the remnant of the Midianites were followed relentlessly over the Jordan, and at last overtaken in the depths of the desert, where a third victory crushed the power of these lawless hordes for many years.

Gideon's share in the spoil was the golden earrings, thrown, as a willing gift, on his war-cloak, spread out to receive them. The noble-minded man would not, however, touch for himself wealth gained by a victory so evidently from God. Like the Hebrews of his age, he had always had a household altar, and over this he hung an ephod which he decked with the gold, and dedicated to Jehovah. But though to him it was an innocent symbol of gratitude and zeal, it became an object of idolatrous reverence to his gross and superstitious countrymen, and even to his household.

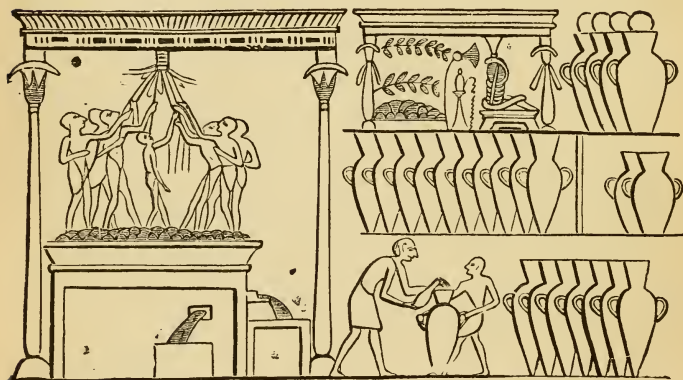
Profound peace continued during the rest of Gideon's life. The value of union under a central authority had been deeply felt by its results in his case, and led to proposals that he and his sons should be the hereditary rulers of Israel. But he was too humble and too faithful to the theocratic constitution of Moses to listen to any such overture, however flattering. Jehovah alone, so far as he was concerned, should be their king.

The fate of Gideon's family was tragical. He had married many wives, and had the amazing number of seventy sons. He had, besides, a son born to him by a concubine, or wife of the second degree,—an

ambitious man, eager to grasp the royal dignity which Gideon had reverently declined. To clear the way for his doing so, he massacred the whole of his brothers, with the exception of the youngest, who escaped.

The fame of Gideon's great victory lingered long in Israel. Samuel speaks of it: Asaph sings of it in one of his psalms: Isaiah can find no higher image of triumph than "the day of Midian;" and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews enrols Gideon in the number of the heroes of the faith.¹

¹ 1 Sam. xii. 11; Psalm lxxxiii. 9; Isa. ix.; Heb. xi. 32.



TREADING THE WINE PRESS, AND ALSO THE WINE CELLAR, WITH THE WINE IN JARS. EGYPTIAN.—*Wilkinson*. (See p. 152.)

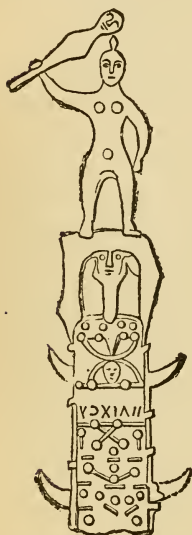


JEPHTHAH.

FROM the narrative of Gideon's victory on the western side of the Jordan, and his subsequent leadership of part, at least, of the territory of Palestine proper, the Book of Judges passes—after a notice of the sad fate of his sons, and of the abortive attempt of Abimelech to found a monarchy in his own person—to the other side of the river, and supplies a few glimpses of the anarchy and struggles that prevailed there, as elsewhere, in this early chaotic period of Jewish history. A chieftain of the tribe of Issachar, Tola—"The self-exalter," son of Perah—"The mouth" of God, son of Dodo—"The friend of Jehovah"—had risen after Abimelech's overthrow, and had judged part, at least, of the western tribes, for twenty-three years, at Shamir—"The thorny"—in the hills of Ephraim, north of Jerusalem. But his leadership is passed over in two verses, and seems to have been uneventful, though that may have been its highest praise.

Over the river, in the wide and fertile region of Gilead, twenty-two years passed under the headship of a man of Manasseh,—Jair by name,—of whom it is only mentioned that he had thirty sons, who each had a village and its district, and assumed the recognised symbol of authority by riding on asses. Such

a divided rule could not fail to be disastrous. Whatever the religious state of the people was under Jair, he was no sooner dead than they relapsed into the idolatry of the surrounding nations, and worshipped, in different parts, as the nearest heathen population inclined them, images of Baal and of Astarte, and other idols of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, or of the Philistines, wholly forsaking the worship of Jehovah.



SARDINIAN-PHENICIAN IDOL
WITH NEO-PHENICIAN
INSCRIPTION.

Corrupted and weakened by this religious decline, there was no longer among them that puritan enthusiasm which carried with it the pledge of victory over heathenism, and they naturally fell under the power of the races around, who were more numerous or more warlike than themselves. The Philistines on the west, and the children of Ammon, whose land the eastern tribes had occupied, simultaneously attacked them, the latter even passing over the Jordan and harrying the tribes on the west of it.

Eighteen years of this wide-spread calamity at last awoke a better spirit in Israel. It was clear that the idols they served did not help them, and they justly felt that their sufferings were due to their infidelity to their own God. Humbled and penitent, the fiery zeal which had once given their forefathers the victory over all enemies was once more rekindled.

Among the signs and results of the lawless and disjointed times was the prevalence of armed bands of fugitives from oppression, and of men less worthy, which

haunted the outlying districts, and lived by forays on the enemy's territory. As in the time of David, before he was king, or as in that of Herod, any leader could get desperate men to follow him. But of all who had betaken themselves to this guerilla warfare in these earlier days, none was so famous as a Gileadite, Jephthah—"Life is from God." He was an illegitimate son, and having been thrust out of his father's house, landless and homeless, on account of his birth, had betaken himself to the borders of his tribe, and begun the career of a partizan leader against the Ammonites.

In their extremity, the chiefs or "elders" of Gilead had come to feel that open resistance was necessary to save from utter destruction, and in the search for a leader their choice fell on Jephthah. Sending messengers to him to the distant part where he was, they proposed that he should head them in a war against Ammon. His answer seems to hint at wrongs suffered from them, as the authorities of Gilead, and sounds as if they had driven him into banishment for his patriotic zeal against an enemy whom, at the time, they themselves had not the spirit to resist. "Did not ye hate me," asked he, "and expel me out of my father's house? Why are ye come unto me now in your distress?" He had evidently been seeking the headship of the eastern tribes before his banishment, and now made it a condition of his return, that if he led them successfully against the Ammonites, he should formally receive it.

The wild border-hero, like all the leaders of this disastrous age, shines by contrast with his people at large, in his loyalty to Jehovah as opposed to false gods. There is no mention of the sacred name in the overture from the chiefs of Gilead, but Jephthah in

every sentence of his reply to them recognises God's presence, and the necessity of His help, if Israel is to be freed. There is an earnest religiousness in his whole bearing.

The centre of the eastern tribes at the time was Mizpeh—"The watch-tower"—the scene of Jacob's parting from Laban. Thither Jephthah went to meet the people, gathered in solemn assembly, and after taking the usual oaths before Jehovah, was solemnly elected their head and captain, and as such received their homage. In spite of his illegitimacy he had reached the height of his ambition, and was, at last, made king of Gilead.

His first step, after being thus chosen, was to send messengers to the king of Ammon, detailing the claim of Israel to the territories held by it east of the Jordan. His knowledge of the history of his people, however obtained, was minute and exact, embracing the whole story of the conquest of Gilead under Moses, and of his relations to all the communities with which he came in contact in the Wilderness Wanderings. Gilead, said Jephthah, had belonged to the Ammonites and others, and was rightfully taken by Israel as the prize of war. It was now a contest between Chemosh, the god of Ammon, and Jehovah. Each nation had what its god had given it: let each keep its own in peace! The claim of Ammon to Gilead was scouted as out of date. It had not been advanced till now, after Israel had held the land for three hundred years.

On Ammon's refusal to retire and make peace, Jephthah at once prepared for the offensive. Passing from place to place, he summoned the strength of the country to follow him. All was wild excitement. With a people till lately dispirited and even now weak, to

resist a power that had so long been dominant was to risk everything on the event of a battle. Vows were then habitual in the critical turns of life. Jacob and Abraham's steward had made them,¹ and in later years they still continued a prominent feature of Israelitish religion.² Jephthah, in his fierce enthusiasm, sought to make sure of the help of God, beforehand, by a similar pledge. The long corruption of the popular mind by contact with local idolatry had introduced many heathen ideas, and had obscured the spirit of the law of Moses. "If thou, O Jehovah," cried the wild soldier, "shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, I will offer up as a burnt-offering to Thee whatever cometh forth from my doors to meet me, when I return in peace." A rash vow, to be bitterly repented!

Sweeping like a whirlwind on the enemy, amidst this fervour of enthusiasm, nothing could resist Jephthah's attack. Ammon was speedily conquered through its length and breadth, and Israel took the place of master where it had been slave. The proof that political freedom depended on religious zeal could not have been more signal.

The campaign over, the citizen-army returned in triumph to Mizpeh, to be disbanded. News of the victory had gone before them, and the conquerors were greeted with universal rejoicings as they passed on their way. Only in Jephthah's mind was there any lingering anxiety. His vow stood recorded, and, as he believed, must be paid,—for Jehovah, as it seemed, had accepted it, and granted that which it had been offered to obtain. At the least, it pledged him to a human sacrifice, for no beast could "come forth from his doors to meet him."

¹ Gen. xxviii. 20; xxiv. 12.

² Isa. xix. 21; Psalm lxi. 8; cxvi. 14.

He had spoken rashly, but he had spoken, and, in his great wild soul, to have done so, made fulfilment, in any case, a religious duty. If only a slave met him, it would matter little, for slaves were counted as little worth ; but it might be much more. The event outdid the worst anticipation.

In a wild licentious time Jephthah had lived a pure life, and had only one child, a daughter, now opening into the glory of womanhood, and dear to him beyond words, as much for the qualities of her head and heart as for her blood. Proud of her father's glory, she had prepared a fond ovation for him on his return, and gathering the maidens round, decked in their holiday bravery, had sallied out with them to greet him with music and the dance. Little did she think what wailing should come of her rejoicings ! As the tired warriors came near, the procession advanced to meet them, with his daughter, to Jephthah's unspeakable agony, at their head. What was he to do ? He had sworn to Jehovah, and his simple heart never dreamed of possible escape from his oath. And had not the victory granted him shown that God held him to his word, by performing His part of the pledge ? The ideas of times like these were rude and imperfect. Even two thousand years later the wild Clotaire had no other conception of the Almighty, than to groan out, as life was departing, "*Wa, wa*, what great God is this that pulls down the strength of the mightiest kings ?" ¹ and Jephthah, in these still wilder early Jewish times, may well have had as crude a theology. Other nations round burned their dearest to propitiate their gods ; and had not Abraham been told to slay Isaac, though he was hindered in the end ?

¹ Carlyle's *French Revolution*, p. 21.

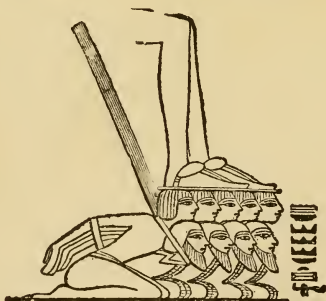
The sense of old wrongs lay deep in the hero's soul, amidst all the success that had forced his countrymen to do him honour. He still thought of his life as an outlaw, and of all he had suffered, but seemed at last rising finally above it, when the sight of his daughter changed his cup of gladness into one of the bitterest sorrow. "Alas, my daughter!" cried he, as he rent his clothes, "thou hast brought me very low, little as thou thoughtest to do so! Even thou, my dear one, art become one of those who cause me pain, for I have opened my mouth to Jehovah, and I cannot go back!" Then he told her all the story of the oath, and how she had unwittingly forced him, to whom she was dearer than life, to be her death.

But the daughter was greater than the father. No womanly firmness and grandeur of soul could surpass hers as she heard the appalling words. An oath to Jehovah, she took for granted, must be performed; and was not her death a small return for the victory of her people? She made no complaint, and asked only two months to prepare for her dismal end. No wonder that the daughters of Israel, in after ages, yearly lamented her, and would not let the remembrance die of the father presiding at the funeral pile of his only child, because he had sworn to God, and fancied his oath could not be broken; or of the daughter meekly bearing an awful death, on a hill-top in Gilead, at that father's hand, from the same mistaken sense of duty!

The only other notice of Jephthah is a painful illustration of his age. Ephraim, proud and fierce as ever, refused to join the force which assailed Ammon, but were indignant, after it had been conquered, at not having had a share in the honour. Gideon had known how to appease their pride by a soft answer, but Jephthah had

only a plain statement of the facts, which irritated them so much the more. Taunts were freely interchanged, and a fierce battle at last took place in Gilead, and ended in the defeat of the men of Ephraim. Unhappily, the victors did not know how to temper triumph with mercy, but hastening to the fords of the Jordan, refused permission to any to cross without the utterance of a test word, the pronounciation of which disclosed the side of the speaker. The men of Gilead pronounced a certain word as Shibboleth, which the Ephraimites could only call Sibboleth, and this proof of having crossed in the hostile army was deemed enough to warrant instant death. In the blind and cruel heat of the moment forty-two thousand men are said to have fallen. Had Jephthah been a truly great man, he never would have sanctioned such bloody reprisals on a brother tribe. It was, indeed, as short-sighted as it was cruel, for the weakening of Israel played into the hands of her foes.

The whole period of Jephthah's sway was only six years. Perhaps he pined away after the sad fate of his daughter, for it must have embittered all his glory, and have left him desolate and broken-hearted.



TREADING ENEMIES UNDER FOOT.



SAMSON AND DELILAH.

WHILE the northern parts of Palestine were subjected to repeated conquest by Canaanite princes, or by the hordes of the desert, during the time of the Judges, the southern tribes were exposed to the attacks of a rising power, of a western race—the Philistines—long settled in the land, but only now beginning to be dangerous.

This warlike people had wandered to Palestine, from the island of Crete,¹ and had gained a firm footing on the rich coast-plain of the Shefelah, north and south of Askelon, in the days of Abraham. In the later times of the Judges, however, they had extended their rule over the greater part of the country, and maintained their supremacy till the reign of David. Allying themselves with the dreaded remnant of the aboriginal inhabitants still surviving at Gaza, Hebron, and elsewhere, in their territory, they completely broke the strength of Israel; for their trade was war, and an agricultural people was ill-fitted to resist them. Even the brave tribe of Judah, in its mountain home, which seemed expressly suited for easy defence, was forced to yield to them, and the conquest was made the more secure by a general dis-

¹ A great number of Philistines were settled in the Delta of Egypt.

arming of the Hebrews, who were forced to go down from their hills to the Philistine towns on the sea-plain, for the simplest smith's work required in their field labour.¹

This utter prostration lasted for more than a hundred years, yet there were never wanting brave men to maintain the unequal struggle for the ancient liberty of their race. The constant wars of the times of Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David—"The breaker of the horn of the Philistines"²—preserve glimpses of an unconquerable determination to throw off the yoke of the "uncircumcised." Even when the people, almost in despair from their harsh oppression, hid in the caves and fissures of the rocks, so common in Palestine, or fled beyond the Jordan, brave spirits, like Saul and Jonathan, stood, sword in hand,³ in the midst of the defenceless people, and did not shun the fight. The time of the Philistine domination was the true heroic age of Israel: its painful discipline developed the national strength and power of endurance, and the amazing efforts of the people at large, and of individual warriors, at last, with God's help, restored the long lost independence. Later generations looked back with grateful admiration to the great men who had fought in these terrible days, not only with the common Philistine, but with the gigantic descendants of the old races; with Goliath, with Isbi, bearing his ponderous lance, and Sippai, and the huge man "of the sons of the giant," with twenty-four fingers and toes. Stirring tales of their deeds were recounted by father and son. It was told how David overcame Goliath; how Adino the Eznite, surnamed Hachmom—"The wise"—and Josheb Bassebet—"He who sits in

¹ 1 Sam. xiii. 19-21.

² Eccelus. xlvii. 7.

³ 1 Sam. xiii. 22.

the council"—slew eight hundred Philistines at once; how Abishai once slew three hundred; and how three of the thirty famous chiefs of David broke through the enemy and brought their lord a draught of the water of the well of his native mountain village, Bethlehem.¹ Of these, the long illustrious roll-call was headed by Samson—"the destroyer," son of Manoah.

In the earlier days of Samuel, when the Ark of God had been taken, under Eli's priesthood, the sufferings of Israel at last brought a deliverer. A worthy man, by name Manoah—"Jehovah is my rewarder"—lived with his wife in Zorah—"the hornet's town"—a place on one of the spurs of the hills of Judæa, overlooking the Philistine plain. Like Sara and Hannah, his wife had been long married without having a child, but a Divine intimation given to her, as to them, predicted the birth of a son, who should begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. Like Samuel, he was to be vowed to Jehovah from his birth, as a Nazarite, or "consecrated one," separated to God from the common mass of men by external signs seen of all. As such, he was to taste neither wine nor strong drink, and thus to offer a protest against the intemperance which had grown rank in Israel, and was specially hurtful in such a climate. He was, further, to observe the Levitical laws of food with the utmost strictness, and thus teach his countrymen the duty, under their laws, of absolute separation from the heathenism around, which had corrupted and ruined them. Still more, his hair was to grow untouched, save by himself, and was never to be cut, as a sign of special endowment for his great task, in which he was thus proclaimed to be in reality the instrument of God. He is the earliest Nazarite of whom

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 16.

we read, and no symbol could be more instructive, at a time when all the impulses of religion and patriotism needed to be awakened in a people so deeply sunken in moral and religious declension.

Marked out as a constant living lesson of the truths most needed to be remembered by his people, that strength and deliverance could come only from Jehovah, and were granted by Him to those alone who separated themselves from idolatry, paid due regard to His law, and gave themselves to His service, Samson grew up within sight of the towns and villages of the oppressors of his race. The one work of his life, for which his Nazarite consecration to God was the preparation, was to wage war on the Philistine. As Hannibal was vowed in his infancy, at the altar, as the enemy of Rome, Samson grew up from childhood as the fore-ordained enemy of Gaza and Ekron, and their race. To keep this in mind explains much in his history. The service of God is very different at different times. In Samson's day, it was felt to lie pre-eminently in self-devotion to the great work of saving and restoring the national existence of Israel, as the chosen people,—as, in the time of our own Alfred, or in that of Gustavus Vasa, it might naturally have been conceived as lying in the expulsion of the Danes from England and Sweden respectively. That a low morality obtained as yet, in many points, is no contradiction to the enthusiastic religious zeal which centred in the idea of a war of national deliverance. It was the rescue of the “people of God” from their enemies; and the vindication of the rights of Jehovah over the land, as its King.

The tribe of Dan, to which Samson belonged, had always been comparatively small, and had been unable to wrest the district, assigned to it by Joshua from the

hands of the Philistines, who had penned it up among the hills, and kept it from the rich sea-coast plain at their foot. So straitened, indeed, was their position, that they had in the end to send off a colony to conquer new territory in the north, "for an inheritance to dwell in."¹ Meanwhile, they had "a camp" on the hills overhanging the Philistine plain, and there the young Samson first showed indications of his future prowess. Sacredly devoted to Jehovah, and true to his vows, Israel began to hear how "the spirit of Jehovah moved" the long-haired lad "at times," as the special and visibly consecrated instrument of Divine influence.

The deeds of the young Nazarite and his whole course through life mark the darkness of the times. He had to act by himself throughout, for there was no army to lead, and the one sphere of his daring was the narrow territory of his oppressed tribe. His influence in reviving the national spirit was through the report of his deeds, which passed from lip to lip over the land. He did not act as a "judge," like Gideon or Jephthah, over a larger or smaller extent of the country, but was rather the fearless hero who, alone, in the depths of its misery, never despaired of his nation.

The picture we have of him shows us a great, kindly Hercules, fierce and terrible in battle, but weak and unwise in the lap of woman: modest and silent as to his deeds, full of a homely humour and rioting in the glory of his strength and animal spirits. Love and marriage, which blend, more or less, the most hostile populations, were not unknown between the Hebrews and the uncircumcised, and Samson, always wayward in his relations to the other sex, was caught, like others of his countrymen, by the charms of a Philistine girl,

¹ Judges xviii. 1.

at Timnath, on the seaward slope of the hills, amidst famous vineyards—a part of the land of Dan, but still held by the Philistines. Manoah must get her for him: nothing would please him else, though she was of the hated race; and her father, helpless in his resistance, had to yield. Going to see her when betrothed, a young lion attacked Samson, but, like David in a similar case,¹ he slew it, “rending it as he would have rent a kid, though he had nothing in his hand.”² In the wreck of the carcase left by the vultures and ants, and dried in the hot sun to a mere shell of skin and bone,³ a swarm of bees ere long took up their abode, and had already begun to store their comb, when Samson once more went down to Timnath to claim his bride. At the marriage feast, which lasted seven days, thirty young men of the Philistines formed the company on the side of the young wife, and amongst the riddles with which it was the custom to fill up moments in the rejoicings, was one to which this strange incident formed the key. The bridegroom offered to give each of the thirty a tunic of linen, and a costly outer robe,⁴ if they could answer it; they promising to pay him the same if they could not. Failing to guess it, they managed, by threats and insinuations, to gain over the young wife to “befool” her husband into telling it to her in confidence, and then betraying his trust. “They would burn her and her father’s family alive,” if she did not: “she had invited them to the feast only to rob them.” Her tears and arts prevailed; but Samson saw the treachery, and though he paid the stake, he did it by going off to the distant town of Askelon, and wreaking

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35.

² Judges xiv. 6.

³ See Tristram’s *Natural History of the Bible*, 324.

⁴ Judges xiv. 12.

his indignation on thirty Philistines, from whose bodies he took the garments needed.

He had now finally begun the fierce war with the oppressors, which ended only with his death. His wife, whom he had left, in anger at her unfaithfulness, was given by her father to another, and was refused to Samson on his re-claiming her. Fierce reprisals on his side followed. The shocks in the harvest-fields of the Philistines of Timnath, their standing corn, and vine and olive yards were burned by him. On this, his wife and her father were burned alive by the infuriated villagers, but Samson retaliated by a fierce attack, in which many of them were slain. Taken prisoner soon after, with his own consent, by the men of Judah, now basely betraying their hero to the common foe, he snapped his bonds with ease, and turning against his enemies, miraculously slew a great multitude, and then returned in safety to his own hills.¹

As woman had led Samson into the first of the episodes related of his history, she was the occasion of the two others which follow. Samson's morality, like that of Judah, and of his age, was defective enough where his passions moved him. Trapped at Gaza, when in a loose woman's house, he saved himself by wrenching up the town gate and carrying it off. The danger might have taught him wisdom and a purer life, but ere long another woman, doubtless a Philistine, once more snared him, as it proved, to his ruin.

In the valley of Sorek, just below his own village of

¹ It is to be noted that the name of the hill near which this deliverance of Samson was effected was Lehi—that is, “the jaw-bone,” perhaps from its shape. The water with which he was refreshed is said, in the Hebrew, to have flowed from Lehi; doubtless the *hill* Lehi.

Zorah, lived a courtesan, by name Delilah, whom the Philistine chiefs, in accordance with the frequent practice of these ages, resolved to make their instrument. Offering her a great reward if she could allure Samson, and obtain from him the secret of his strength, she plied her wiles only too successfully, and ere long had the mighty man helplessly in her toils. Simple as a child in the hands of an artful woman, his perilous secret was soon divulged, and then came the end. Milton's grand poem has told the story with matchless pathos and force. The blinded hero, forced to make sport for his enemies; his consciousness that his sin had been the cause of his downfall; his penitence, and fervent cries to Jehovah for pardon and restored favour; his returning strength as his hair grew again—the sign of his consecration to God; and then the last fierce revenge, in which “he slew more at his death than in his life”—come before us in quick succession, and waken, by turns, our sympathy and admiration.

To realize such a character as that of Samson we must restore, in imagination, the circumstances of his times. How great a heart must that have been which dared to stand out alone against a tyranny that crushed and cowed even the strong and warlike tribe of Judah till they consented to hunt him down at the bidding of their masters, and deliver him—the one patriot of the land—into the hands of the common enemy. “Knowest thou not,” said the craven hearts, “that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that thou hast done unto us?” When their hills were invaded by the Philistine troops they bribed them to retire by undertaking to deliver up to his enemies the one true man of their race! They would rather live quietly as slaves than strike for liberty. To be simply brave

and great in an age of cowardice and degradation is heroic in the noblest sense. Gustavus Vasa in the wilds of Dalecarlia, Alfred in the marshes of Somersetshire, or Hereward the Saxon in the fens of Lincoln, are imperfect parallels, for they had followers ready to brave death with them, but Samson was alone—the solitary constant soul in a dispirited nation.

Nor is his rude but unchanging fidelity to Jehovah, as his God, less touching. In spite of his being apparently deserted by Him, and though the enemy boasted that Dagon had proved himself the greater god by his victory over Jehovah's champion, Samson held fast to his faith. His countrymen had turned to idols, but he, in his rough way, clung to the God of his fathers.

There is a wild sublimity, moreover, in his self-destruction, that arrests regard. Life, now that he was blind, and no longer able to go out against the enemy of his God, was not worth having. Yet he would sell it dearly, and make the mourning for him in Philistia long and deep. No wonder that the recollections of such a soul were cherished through age after age, for it is by such examples that a nation keeps alive its noblest qualities.





RUTH.

IT is a singular illustration of the greatness of David in the history of Israel, that the only narratives in which woman is prominently introduced are found, on examination, to be those of his ancestors. Doubtless the supreme ulterior end, in the providence of God, was to reflect light on the genealogy of our Lord, who was descended from David; but to the holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, unconscious "what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them signified,"¹ the glory of their most illustrious king must have been the prominent thought. The story of Tamar, the mother of Perez, traces his pedigree to Judah; Rahab, as we find in the first chapter of St. Matthew, was the ancestress of Boaz, and through him of the great king, who, himself, sprang from Ruth, in the third generation.² The glory of Israel culminated in the son of Jesse, and all that illustrated his ancestry was of paramount interest to the nation.

The incidents narrated in the charming story of Ruth carry us back to the closing years of the long disastrous period of the Judges. They belong to the third generation before David, and thus may be safely reckoned as

¹ Peter i. 11.

² Matt. i. 5, 6.

happening about a hundred years before his day. While indirectly shedding light on the times, historical details are kept in the background throughout, and the whole story is framed as a picture of the self-forgetting love of Ruth to the family of her dead husband. Her undying faithfulness and its rich reward are the lesson that strikes the reader. Giving up every prospect of exchanging her lonely widowed state for a joyful remarriage, Ruth leaves her home, her parents, and even her gods, for love to her tried and desolate mother-in-law. She has no thought of self. Her only desire is to give herself up to her stricken friend, as an inseparable companion and consoler. To care for her, and to render her all filial duty, is supreme delight. The blessing that rests on such fidelity must have been a still more vivid lesson to the ancient Jew than it is to us. The good fortune which Ruth puts from her, in her affection for Naomi, comes to meet her, in the richest fulness, in Israel, with whom she had cast in her lot. The favour of God, and the laws of His people protecting the widow, bring her greater happiness than she had voluntarily resigned. She is honoured to make up to her mother-in-law the loss of her two sons, and her praises from the lips of her neighbours make her name famous in Israel for ever.

A famine had struck the district round Bethlehem, perhaps as the result of the troublous times, for men were never sure in those days of reaping what they had sown.¹ Hostile inroads were continually sweeping away or trampling under foot the husbandman's toil. One of the villagers, by name Elimelech—"God is his king"—under these circumstances felt it better to emigrate for a time to the territory of Moab, which

¹ Judges vi. 3.

lay east of them, on the other side of the Dead Sea, and had escaped the calamities that had desolated Israel. Taking with him his wife Naomi — either “Pleasantness” or “Jehovah is good”—and his two sons, Mahlon,—“The weakling,”—and Chilion,—“He who pined away”—he therefore left Bethlehem, and made Moab his home.

But our best-laid plans often miscarry, and what we do for our good many times turns out a mistake. Away from his old neighbours and friendly landscape, Elimelech in a few years drooped and died; and to make matters still more sad for Naomi, their two sons did not long survive him. They had, however, taken more kindly to their new country than their father could, and had married wives of its daughters: Orpah—“The freshness of youth”—and Ruth—“The friend.” Marriage of Israelites with the people of Moab was not forbidden, but only with the Canaanites,¹ though it required ten generations, by the strict law, for the incorporation of a Moabite into the chosen people.² It was not till Ezra’s day that marriage with them was made unlawful.³

The young lives of the bridegrooms were doomed, however, to be speedily blighted. “Like blossomed trees, upturned by vernal storms,” they were scarcely wedded when they faded and died, leaving their mother not only a widow, but childless. Moab had no longer any attractions. It was associated, rather, with bitter memories. The evil times at Bethlehem were past; she would return to it, for she would there find at least neighbours she had known of old, and her loneliness would be tempered by their society.

Ten years had passed since she had left, and now she was returning sad and broken. Her sons’ widows

¹ Deut. vii. 3.

² Deut. xxiii. 4.

³ Ezra ix. 1.

would not, however, let her go forth alone, but went with her on her way back to Judah. They had been kind wives and dutiful daughters, and now their friendliness clung to Naomi more closely than ever. They escorted her till she thought it well for them to return, and fondly proposed that they should do so. "Go," said she, "return each to her mother's house: Jehovah deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." Born amidst idolatry of the darkest type, they had grown up pure and affectionate,—a proof that even in the most unlikely spots the grace of God, in all ages, has its triumphs, and that even on the soil of heathenism there springs, at least here and there, a sweet fragrance of better things. "Jehovah grant you," continued Naomi, "that ye may find rest, each of you, in the house of another husband." So saying, she kissed them, and the two lifted up their voice, and wept.

But she had been worthy of their love, and they could not bear to leave her. "We cannot bid you farewell," sobbed they,—“we will go back with you to your people.” But Naomi, kind and loving as she was, was no less practical. Marriage was the one great hope of the sex in those days, alike for present support, and from the craving for offspring which marked the Hebrew and his related races, for to be the mother of a son is still the highest honour of any Eastern woman. She had no sons to give them for husbands; she was old, and a widow, and even if she were to have other sons—which was not to be thought of—would the young widows wait till infants grew up to men fit for husbands? They had better go back, for otherwise they must remain widows.

A second outburst of grief followed this loving per-

suasion. It had touched the heart of Orpah. She felt the common-sense of it, and once more kissing Naomi, turned back to Moab. But Ruth was of a more disinterested nature. What had been said might be both wise and true, but her heart clave to her mother-in-law, and permitted no thought of self. It was vain to urge her to follow Orpah. She had gone back to her people and to her gods, but Ruth would not hear of doing so. "Intreat me not to leave thee," said she, "or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." Self-forgetful love like this was invincible; so they went on to Bethlehem together. It was a sad return, for Naomi was so changed that the villagers, her old neighbours, gathering round her in their quiet mountain home, hardly knew her again, and asked each other if this were really she. "No," said she, "it is not I—not Naomi, 'The pleasant,' but Marah—'Bitterness,' for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty." And so she begged she might be called Naomi no more. The simple people, touched by her misery, gave her a kindly welcome among them.

It was the beginning of the barley harvest—in the month of April; and Naomi and Ruth were poor. Gleaning was then a sacred right of the lowly, and Ruth was eager to help to get food for herself and Naomi, by gathering after the reapers, in any field where the old kindly custom was yet held sacred. Descending the deep terraced side of the limestone hill

which Bethlehem crowns, to the pleasant valley through which a brook still murmurs amidst fields of barley, Ruth happened to light on a part belonging to a rich villager—Boaz, and was gleaning there when he came down from Bethlehem to see how his reapers were doing their work. He was a middle-aged, if not an elderly man,¹ and forthwith noticed, and was agreeably struck by the comely maiden so busy among the sheaves. Told whom she was, he forthwith approached and put his field at her service, with the hope that she would not go elsewhere, but follow his maidens who were binding the sheaves. He had given the young men, the reapers, charge, he added, respecting her, not to molest her or drive her away, and she was free, when she felt thirsty, as she would be in the hot sun, to go to the water jars and refresh herself. It would save her time.

Ruth was overwhelmed, and knelt at his feet, with expressions of wonder at favour so marked, shown to one, like herself, a stranger. But Boaz told her how he had heard of her kindness to Naomi, and of her having left her country and friends to be with her. "The



HARVEST SCENE.

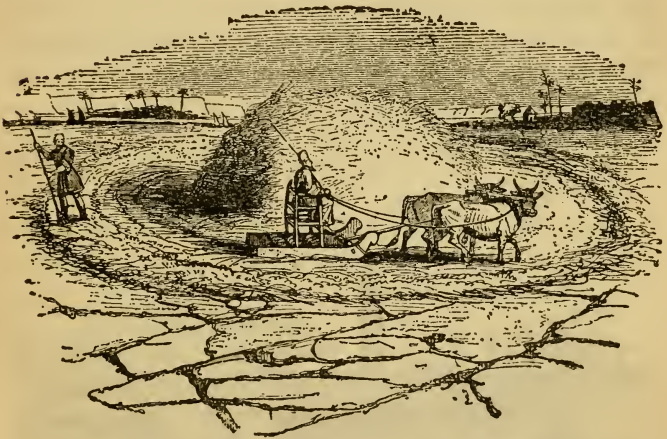
¹ Chap. iii. 10.

Lord recompense thy deed," said he, "and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." A modest answer of Ruth's touched the rich man still more, and drew forth a still further tenderness. She must join his reapers at meal-time, "and eat their bread, and dip her morsel in the vinegar." The labourers, catching the spirit of their master, took care that she should want for nothing. "Let her glean," said Boaz to his men, when she had gone back to her toil—"let her glean even among the sheaves, and let fall some handfuls to help her." He was smitten by the fair face and fairer fame of the young Moabite, though, perhaps, he hardly knew it.

When Ruth toiled up the hill in the evening, to Naomi, with her heavy load, and had told her the whole story of the day, the elder woman saw the whole thing at a glance, and forthwith remembered that Boaz was her kinsman, and as such, by the law, owed Ruth the duty of buying back the inheritance of her dead husband, Chilion, and, better still, of himself marrying her, and thus giving her a home. Ruth must keep to his field, and stay close to his maidens at their sheaf-binding, till not only the barley but the wheat harvest was over.

The fields clear and the threshing begun in the open air, as was wont, Naomi, who had doubtless been thinking much on the matter, told Ruth her mind. She should take steps to get Boaz to acknowledge his obligation to marry her. "Why," added the kindly matron, "should I not seek a home for thee, that it may be well with thee?" Like all women who have themselves been happily married, Naomi was at heart a match-maker.

The plan advised was in strict accordance with Eastern ways, though it seems strange to us; and it succeeded perfectly. To Ruth's frank statement that, as her near kinsman, Boaz should marry her, in the room of her dead husband, his relative, he at once consented, if, as he added, a nearer kinsman, who lived in the village, did not claim her. He even praised her that she had been so thoughtful of his duty and her own



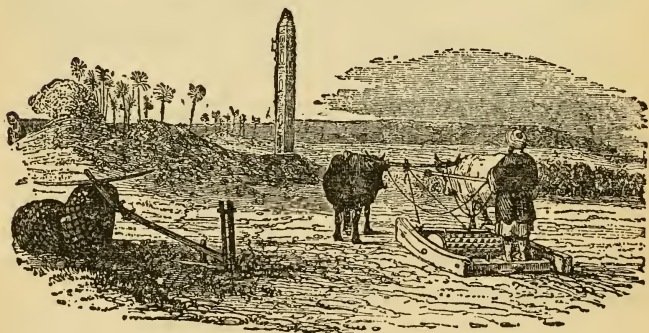
THRESHING MACHINE OF MODERN EGYPT.

to Chilion, in looking to him, instead of seeking some young and attractive person for husband.

Next morning the kinsman was summoned by Boaz to meet him before ten of the village elders. He was willing to redeem Chilion's inheritance, but not to marry Ruth. The way was, therefore, clear, and with due legal form Boaz undertook the whole obligations. He would buy the rights of Naomi, her husband and her sons, to their inheritance, and, with them, Ruth herself

to be his wife—holding the land in trust for her son if she should have one.

Thus Ruth became the wife of Boaz, the rich man of the village, and, ere long, Naomi had the delight of taking a grandson in her arms, and pressing him to her bosom. In after years the neighbours told her, “The boy will be a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age.” So both she and Ruth were glad, and they would have been still more so had they known that the baby over whom they rejoiced would be the father of one who was to boast of King David as his son, and, through him, be the ancestor of the Saviour of the world.



EASTERN HARROW.



ELI.

ELI is the last reminiscence of the long, disastrous age of the Judges, and is brought before us in the sacred book which bears the name of the prophet Samuel. He fitly closes the strictly theocratic period of the history of Israel, as at once high-priest and chief magistrate, and introduces the new age of the Kings.

Eli—"The highest"—seems rather a title than a private name, but this is only conjecture, as we know nothing whatever of the earlier life of him who bore it. When introduced in the sacred narrative he is already in extreme old age, and is recognised by Israel as its religious and political head.

That a priest should be judge as well, so far from offering any violence to Jewish ideas, was rather their legitimate realization. Jehovah being acknowledged as the invisible King of the tribes, He could have no human representative among them so natural and fitting, as the Head of the religion He had graciously revealed.

Eli is the only instance, however, of this union of the two highest offices in one person; and this, on the one hand, seems to indicate the gradual advance towards political consolidation, which soon afterwards culminated in the election of a hereditary king, while on the other, his being judge as well as priest may not improbably

hint at his having acted as soldier in his early life, as his own sons did in after years. It is only in peaceful times that the priest, as such, attains active political power as the head of a rude people, and the age was the reverse of quiet. Israel had still to guard its home in the tableland of Palestine against numerous enemies, and needed a warrior to protect and lead it.

The eastern and northern borders of the Hebrew territory seem gradually to have been left in quiet. The victories of Gideon, Jephthah, and Barak had apparently broken the power of their enemies, the Arabs of the Eastern desert and the Canaanites of the northern hills and plains. But one people remained not only strong, but virtually dominant, in the southern districts. The Philistines, who may have been a branch of the Shepherd invaders of Egypt, driven thence in the patriarchal age, had gradually risen from a pastoral clan to a warlike community. Masters of the richest part of Palestine—the rolling lowlands on the coast, from above Jaffa, to the wilderness on the south—they had yielded for a time to the wave of Hebrew conquest under Joshua, but had speedily risen against the intruders, and driven them from the fertile plains to the central hills. A fierce, implacable hatred succeeded; for the Jew openly claimed the whole country, and doubtless often tried to extend his narrow bounds beyond the tableland.

In these chronic hostilities Israel ere long proved the weaker. The Philistines were rich and strong, not only by the natural wealth of their territory, but by its situation, which commanded the transit commerce between the east and Egypt. The Hebrew tribes on the hills, poor, and weakened by their division into independent clans, were an easy prey to a people so vigorous. Slaves

were wanted, and a raid into the hills of Judea supplied them. The harvests of the upland valleys were tempting, and were therefore carried off from time to time, by sudden invasions from the plains. Israel had at last sunk into such weakness that no smith was allowed to ply his trade among them,—a prohibition equivalent to a general disarmament of the nation. In Eli's time things had come, apparently, to the worst, for Samson's heroic efforts had done nothing to stem the progress of Philistine conquest, and it was clear that unless a great deliverance was, ere long, effected, the degradation would be complete and perhaps permanent.

The central point in the Hebrew commonwealth, since the days of Joshua, had been Shiloh, a spot about twenty miles nearly north from their future capital, Jerusalem. Shut in among the hills, it lay in the quiet hollow of an upland valley, amidst orchards and vineyards; the earliest and, as yet, the most sacred sanctuary of the nation. The Tabernacle constructed under Moses in the wilderness had been pitched at Gilgal, and elsewhere, during Joshua's conquests, but had been removed to Shiloh when the country was subdued, and remained there till the days of Saul. Amidst all the corruption and darkness of the times of the Judges it had at least given the nation a local centre, and witnessed to the God who had revealed Himself to their fathers.

But the foul heathenism of the land had affected Israel from the days of Baal-peor, and clung to them still in their religious gatherings at Shiloh. Feasts and dances were part of the yearly attractions of the sanctuary, and were apparently associated with as much immorality as those around the heathen temples of their neighbours. Troops of women, shameless as those

of Midian, assembled at stated times, and, though worshippers of Jehovah, united with the service the revolting impurities that characterized the heathen Asherahs.¹ But a great reformer was about to appear.

The notices left us of Eli are closely connected with those of the early life of his divinely appointed successor—Samuel, the last of the Judges, and the founder of the Monarchy. We find him in office as priest when the child of Hannah was solemnly dedicated to Jehovah, and left to grow up in His service in the tabernacle.

The revelations or “visions” which had been common in earlier days had been withheld, as the moral decay of the people made them less fit for their reception. But the pure and saintly spirit of the child Samuel had once more opened an intercourse between Jehovah and His people. Thrice in the night a voice had called the lad, and he had run to Eli, thinking it was his, till Eli, roused to perceive that it could be no other than God Himself, had instructed him how to answer should it come again. A fourth time the mysterious sound broke the stillness, and Samuel, now prepared, heard the words—“Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken against his house : when I begin I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth : because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.”

¹ Translated “groves.”

These ominous words, duly reported to Eli, were not the first of the same kind he had heard from God, and the need for their repetition discloses the weak point in his character.

He had associated his two sons—Hophni and Phinehas—with him in the priesthood, perhaps as assistants, in his feeble age. They had shown themselves, however, wholly unworthy of the sacred office. Stooping to the level of the debased idolatry around, they had taken part in the impurities that defiled the neighbourhood of the Tabernacle, and had thus brought discredit on the worship of Jehovah, among the few who still clung to the purer faith of their fathers. Nor was this all. The duties of the sanctuary at large were treated by them with insolent overbearing disrespect. The very offerings were rudely seized for their own tables, and the sacred office, as a whole, used only for the gratification of their unbridled self-indulgence.

Such a desecration of functions so lofty and awful might well have called forth the sternest reprobation from Eli, as at once the High Priest and Judge of Israel, but it was still more binding on him as the father of the transgressors. Eli, however, though he may have been vigorous in other respects in his earlier years, had no adequate sense of paternal authority, and contented himself with a mild rebuke, when the most unbending severity was demanded, if lighter measures failed. It was no case of disrespect to himself or to a fellow-man, but the foulest abuse of the priesthood of Jehovah, which he had been appointed, as head, to guard and honour. He must have been not only an easy or indulgent parent, but cold and phlegmatic by nature, else such a scandal would have roused him to prompt and vigorous action. Yet he contented himself

with weak remonstrance, and let things continue in their ruinous course when that was unheeded.

So inveterate, indeed, was his cold indifference, that even the voice of a prophet could not quicken him. The worship of Jehovah might be made abhorrent to Israel, but he would do nothing more, high priest though he was, to stop the moral plague, than use disregarded words. "A man of God," doubtless commissioned from above, strove to alarm him, but in vain. He was reminded that his father Aaron's house had been chosen to the priesthood, and yet he, the high priest, virtually slighted the sacred offerings and sacrifices God had commanded, and honoured his sons above Jehovah, letting them take for themselves the choice parts which belonged to the altar. The evil was of long standing, and showed that Eli and his house were unworthy of their high office. A solemn deposition was therefore announced. Eli might hold his dignity till he died, but Hophni and Phinehas would perish together, in the flower of their age. They were sprung from the younger son of Aaron, not from Eliezer, in whose line alone the priesthood was legitimate, and would be displaced in favour of the elder branch, before which they would sink into poverty and contempt.

Even an old man might have been roused to avert such an awful doom from his house, but distant terror was as powerless as a sense of duty had been, to stir him to worthy action.

At last, after long years of patience, the storm of God's indignation burst. The Philistines had once more invaded the mountain homes of Israel, and had defeated the force sent to drive them back. It was the custom of the heathen to carry sacred images with

their armies, as, in later ages, it was that of Christian states to bear with them to battle the relics of saints.¹ In their despair, the elders of Israel fancied that the presence of the ark in the camp might secure them the victory, and therefore sent to Shiloh for it. Eli, always easy and indifferent, yielded to the superstitious demand, and sent it to them under charge of the apostate priests, his sons. For a time its presence sufficed to rouse the dispirited force to enthusiasm, and even the Philistines were alarmed by the shouts with which it was greeted. Determined, however, to retain their supremacy, if possible, they roused themselves to desperate valour, which carried all before it, when the two armies joined battle. Israel was utterly defeated, "and fled every man to his tent," leaving a vast number of dead on the field. Worst of all, the ark of God was taken. But if it were gone, the curse on the house of Eli had signalized its capture, for Hophni and Phinehas lay among the slain. Nor was this all. A messenger from the battle hastened to Shiloh with the disastrous news, and found Eli sitting by the gate of the town, eager to learn what had befallen. The shock of the dreadful tidings proved too much for his weak old age, and he fell dead from his seat. The wife of Phinehas, learning all that had happened, forthwith died in premature labour. The house of Eli was stricken root and branch !

It was long, however, before the predicted doom took its full effect. Eli's sons having perished, the priesthood seems to have passed to his grandson Ahitub,² and it certainly appears to have remained in the family till

¹ The Russians now carry sacred pictures before their regiments as they go out to battle.

² 1 Sam. xiv. 3.

Abiathar, Ahitub's grandson, was "thrust out from being priest unto the Lord" by Solomon, for his share in Adonijah's rebellion.¹ Henceforth it reverted to the elder and legitimate branch of the descendants of Aaron, and Eli's family ceased, as had been predicted, to have any part in it.

The extreme age of Eli excites sympathy with his miserable end, for he was ninety-eight years old when he died. But it is not to be forgotten that through many years he had deliberately dishonoured his high office, by a virtual abdication of its noblest and most sacred duty—the defence of the religion of Jehovah from insult and abuse. It may have been mere paternal weakness, or the phlegm of a cold and apathetic nature, or both; but, in any case, it amounted to a crime for which Israel had to suffer bitterly.

Hophni and Phinehas have in all ages been accepted as the types of a corrupt and degraded ministry in the Church of God, and their disastrous end has justly been held an evident mark of the Divine indignation at all such abuse of the sacred office. Well would it have been if the evils they wrought had ended with themselves! Unfortunately, their example acted widely in spreading moral corruption. So it must always be. Unworthy members of the Christian ministry have to answer not only for their personal guilt, but for the evil they work in others.

¹ 1 Kings i. 7; ii. 26, 27.





SAMUEL.

SAMUEL is one of the greatest names in the history of Israel. As Moses established the theocracy, so Samuel restored its fundamental principles to the supreme place in the national life, and thus, in a true and noble sense, was its second founder. Two of the sacred books, or rather one now divided into two, attest, by their bearing his name, the greatness of his influence on the mind of his people.

Like many of the noblest men, Samuel had the unspeakable blessing of a godly mother. Given by God in answer to her prayers, he was "lent" to Him from his birth, and passed from his mother's side to the sacred chamber of the tabernacle, as his future home.

Elkanah, his father, lived at Ramah, "high" among the round-topped, central hills of Ephraim, and there Samuel was born, in the closing years of Eli's reign as Judge and High Priest. It was the age of Samson, who, in his vow as a Nazarite, embodied the yearning of the better part of the nation for a moral and religious reformation, as the only hope for Israel. In accordance with this, Samuel was vowed in the same way to Jehovah as a lifelong Nazarite. His very name expressed the sacred remembrances associated with his birth. He was to be called Samuel—the son "asked

from God." His father and all the household were wont to go up to Shiloh once a year to offer sacrifice, and to perform the vows they had made since their previous visit, and thither Hannah took her child as soon as he was old enough to do without her care. Henceforth, in fulfilment of her pledge, he was to be given up to the service of Jehovah, and to dwell in His presence. The act of pious surrender was solemnized by a special consecration. A bullock was slain at Shiloh, loaves, flour, and wine presented as an offering, and Samuel handed over to the charge of Eli; his fond mother breaking away from him, doubtless with many tears, after uttering the famous hymn which, in after ages, was to be so largely quoted in Mary's Magnificat. The priests of the tabernacle forthwith clad the infant neophyte, in a white linen ephod or tunic, like their own—and to this Hannah added, each year, when she returned, to see him, an outer mantle, which became so endeared to him, perhaps for his mother's sake, that he continued to wear one like it to his latest years.

He seems to have slept in the Holy Place, and to have had for his duty to extinguish the sacred lamp, and to open the doors of the tabernacle. That he should have been admitted into the service of the priesthood at all, however, seems to mark a laxity in the practice of the times; for though he was perhaps a Levite¹ by descent, he certainly was not a priest.

It was while ministering thus, in early boyhood, that the first revelation came to the wondering child. The stillness of the night, the sacredness of the place, the gentle docility of Samuel, and the reverent counsel of Eli—unite to invest the incident with a universal interest. Henceforth Samuel was recognised by all

¹ 1 Chron. vi. 28-30.

Israel, "from Dan to Beersheba," as "a prophet of Jehovah."

It is a striking testimony to his earnest and deeply grounded religious feelings that he remained uncorrupted by the immorality and ungodliness which in these years had invaded even the precincts of the tabernacle. Hophni and Phinehas might sin if they chose, but as for the lad who might so readily have copied them—he would remain faithful to his mother's God.

The southern tribes of Israel had long been subject to the Philistines, and even the central tribes, of which Ephraim was one, were in terror of their periodical invasions. Eli had notably failed in that loftiness of character and earnestness as a religious reformer, which might have roused and united the nation to shake off the foreign yoke, and his sons had only deepened the moral corruption that was already too general. The terrible defeat at Eben-ezer was the result, followed by the captivity of the ark, in the country of the Philistines, for twenty years, the overthrow of Shiloh as the religious capital, and a still more abject submission of the people than before to their conquerors.

But the lessons of these sad years had not been lost on Samuel. He had traced the calamities of his nation to their true source, and had determined to bring about a politico-religious reformation. Even before the overthrow of the sanctuary at Shiloh he had a wide and commanding influence.

Twenty years pass after this catastrophe without any recorded incident. It is not said who acted as High Priest, but it certainly was not Samuel. The dignity for a time remained in the hands of the house of Eli. In the presence of the grand figure of Samuel, however, its members disappear. He doubtless spent his time in

the slow but resolute work of rekindling the almost extinguished flame of a higher religious life in Israel. The old reverence for a theocracy was not, indeed, quite forgotten, but the sensual worship of Baal and Astarte—the sun and moon—had risen to a proud and ominous rivalry with that of Jehovah; morality was at the lowest ebb, and “the word of the Lord” by special revelation, had become almost a tradition of long past times.

His twenty years’ labour was not, however, lost. The ark had been brought back by the Philistines to Kirjath-jearim, and had gradually become the centre of a new enthusiasm. Slowly, but sincerely, “all the house of Israel” began to “lament after Jehovah.” The long-haired prophet, in his mantle, who for so many years had been moving hither and thither among the people, seeking to stir them to new zeal for the faith of their fathers, had at last fairly roused them. They had come



Assyrian Baalte, after Layard.

to feel the truth of his words, that a return to Jehovah was their only, but certain, hope of deliverance from the yoke of the Philistines.

The national excitement now sought the outward expression of an appeal to Samuel. Repeating the counsel which he doubtless had often given them before, he once more told them that they must put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among them, and “prepare their hearts unto Jehovah,” and serve Him only—and He would give them the victory they asked.

A widespread compliance showed the depth of the new movement. The statues of Baal and Astarte were everywhere thrown down, and Jehovah alone worshipped.¹

The next step was a solemn convocation of the tribes, summoned by Samuel, at Mizpeh, a hill town in Benjamin, that he might "pray for them unto Jehovah." It was a great day in the history of Israel; for the faith of their fathers was once more owned, never to be again forsaken to the extent to which it had been in the past. But merely outward reform was not enough for Samuel. A grand saying, recorded as his, at a later² time, sets no value on burnt offerings and sacrifices, apart from the spirit that dictates them, and proclaims that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." He was already the type of the future line of Prophets which he virtually founded. Religion, in his eyes, was a matter of the soul, not of forms or rites.

A deep and striking solemnity, therefore, marked the new covenant with Jehovah at Mizpeh. Amid symbolical acts and the observance of a universal fast, Israel confessed its past sin, and once more joined itself to the God of its fathers. The part taken by Samuel befitted his character. His prayers rose for the penitent nation, and, though not a priest, he closed his intercession by offering a sacrifice.

The news of the assembly at Mizpeh had reached the Philistines, and led to an immediate attack by them. But a new spirit had been kindled among the Hebrews. Trust in Jehovah had been awakened, and the remembrance of their distant past stimulated them to rival their fathers. The battle that followed ended in their

¹ 1 Sam. vii. 4.

² 1 Sam. xv. 22.

victory. A violent thunderstorm and, as Josephus says, an earthquake, added to the panic of their enemies. The central tribes were once more free, though their southern brethren were still subject to the Philistine.

From this time Samuel acted as judge, an office which seems always to have been connected with military fame. Henceforth, however, he appeared no more in the field, but confined himself to making circuits through the land, judging the various districts. He had already fixed his home at his native town of Ramah, and had married. As years passed, two sons grew up to manhood, but, strange to say, with very different principles from those of their father. His increasing age had made his duties heavy, and to relieve them he had associated these sons with him as inferior judges. But what must have been his distress, to hear rumours, ere long, that they took bribes and perverted their sacred office to a means of unholy gain! Perhaps his frequent absence from home, on his judicial circuits, had been the immediate cause of so sad a catastrophe; perhaps the homage paid the young men in their childhood and youth, as the sons of so revered a father. We may be sure that it was from no fault of his that they turned out so badly. Men engaged in public life have had in all ages to sacrifice their duties at home to those of their public calling, and hence even the sons of the best men, unduly neglected in their earlier years, by the enforced absence of him who could have moulded their characters with most effect, have too often become melancholy sacrifices to the public obligations of their fathers.

The imposing greatness of Samuel's character is seen in the results of his work. He found his people in the deepest national degradation, politically and religiously, and left them on the eve of the most splendid era in their

history,—the age of their widest dominion as a nation, and of their greatest glory as worshippers of Jehovah. He did not attempt to develop the Mosaic economy, or to introduce anything higher, but he restored its deepest principles to commanding influence on the national conscience. He introduced, also, a vital change in the internal history of religion, for in him began the long, illustrious roll of the Prophets, with their earnest practical enforcement of a religion of the heart and life, in distinction from mere outward rite. In the schools of the Prophets which he established, we have the germs of a higher ministry than any ceremonial priesthood. From his day, in spite of the splendour of tabernacle or temple worship under David or Solomon, the priest took the second place in the religious forces of the nation. Henceforth, the living word threw forms and rites into comparative shade. The leaders of Israel had hitherto been warriors, but his sphere was pre-eminently that of a prophet, or speaker for God. The High Priest in his day is unknown; he, himself, as Teacher and Judge, alone appears.

The prevalence of heathenism had greatly weakened the bond between the tribes during the long period of the Judges. But under Samuel's influence the ancient homage to Jehovah spread so widely, and struck root so deep, that it became a new bond of centralization. All Israel looked to him as its head. The homage paid him as the incorruptible judge, the strict Nazarite, and the inspired prophet; his sternness against idolatry, and his appeal to the conscience, in contrast to mere externalism, made the whole nation follow his guidance.

With the new religious and national life, however, which he thus awoke, there showed itself a growing sense that the old political forms were no longer suited

to the wants of the time. To follow a policy of peace alone, would leave the southern tribes in the hands of the Philistines, and expose the rest to hostile attacks. It would further lead, ere long, to the old isolation, which had been so disastrous in the past. Had Samuel's sons been like himself, they might have been chosen as heads of a new system. As long before as Gideon's day, a strong desire had been shown for a settled government of all Israel, under hereditary leaders; Samuel was growing old, and what might not happen if he passed away without an acknowledged successor?

There was, indeed, much to make the introduction of monarchy desirable as a bond of union, and to provide a recognised head in war. Not only were Judah and Simeon subject to the Philistines: that race had a permanent fortified camp at Michmash in the very centre of Benjamin, and besides having disarmed the general population, had enforced military service on part of it against the rest.¹ A passionate longing to free their brethren rose in all hearts, joined with a yearning for a king, in the fond hope that he would protect the tribes still free, from like calamities. The example of the neighbouring kingdoms showed the power that followed the rule of a vigorous head.

Samuel, the uncrowned king while he lived, alone had power to carry out this popular desire. A king chosen by him would receive general homage: would he add to his services that of pointing out whom he thought fit for the high office?

It was a painful request for Samuel. He had laboured through life to restore the Theocracy as it had been under Moses; and a monarchy seemed, at first glance, incompatible with such a constitution. It looked

¹ 1 Sam. xiv. 21.

like a rejection of Jehovah as king. But it raises our conception of his moral greatness to find, that in spite of his cherished antecedents and deep-rooted opinions, he, ere long, in noble unselfishness and humility, yielded to the national will, and consecrated Saul as king. It may be that the circumstances of other tribes than Judah, Simeon, Dan, and Benjamin, influenced him. Urgent danger at the hand of the Amorites threatened the land of Gilead, on the other side of the Jordan. Under their king, Nahash—"The serpent,"—they had long pressed sorely against the eastern tribes, and were even now besieging the fortified town of Jabez.

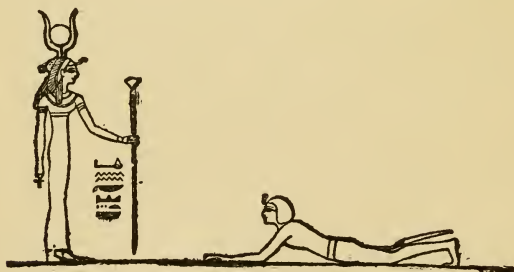
But, though he consented to anoint Saul, and acknowledge him as King, Samuel could not easily lay aside the habits of government, which had become part of his nature. We are told that he judged Israel all the days of his life,¹ and we know that he predicted the downfall of the new dynasty, because Saul had not absolutely obeyed his command to wait till he came to the camp which had been gathered for war against the Philistines. The king had, indeed, waited seven days, but his not waiting even longer was a fatal offence. Between two authorities so opposed there must have been difficulty from the first. Saul's position, in fact, during Samuel's life, seems to have been that of a leader in war, rather than of a ruler.

Doubtless Samuel saw with a keen eye the defects in the new king's nature, and rightly found, in disobedience to himself as an inspired prophet, a want of that complete submission to the voice of God, which, alone, was fitting in the ruler of a theocracy. To defend this was to defend the national religion and life which he had spent his days in rekindling when all but

¹ 1 Sam. vii. 15.

quenched. It was well, also, that the tendency to Eastern despotism, so dangerously strong in the new monarchy, should be sternly repressed, and to Samuel we owe it that Israel remained bound to the law of Jehovah, and did not sink to the slavery of other nations to their kings. His supreme vindication, if any were needed, is read in the end of Saul, and in the fact that the aged prophet prepared the way for David, who recognised and honoured the principles of the Theocracy, and by doing so raised Israel to the greatest glory it ever attained.

Samuel lived, apparently, for more than thirty years after his first anointing Saul, and died at last, in the village where he had been born, and where he had always lived since leaving Shiloh. After such a life, it is no wonder we read that all Israel gathered together and lamented him, when he was laid beside Hannah and Elkanah in the village burial-ground.



AN EGYPTIAN WORSHIPPING ISIS.—After Wilkinson.



SAUL.

IT is a striking characteristic of Jewish history that the transition from a pure theocracy to monarchy took place without usurpation or violence, by the free action of all interested in the change. Causes had been long at work which had gradually prepared the national mind for the step.

Yet the first king in such a monarchy had a position of supreme difficulty. It was totally unlike anything hitherto known. While in name the chief magistrate, it was only in subordination to the supreme will of the invisible King, Jehovah, expressed through specially commissioned prophets. On every side the royal power was limited and directed by the authority of men who held no political office in the State. It was almost inevitable that the first experiment should be a failure. Everything was new, untried, strange. The first reign was at best only an attempt to set the new kingship to work in its singular subordination to theocratic principles. But it served a great end; for if Saul had not thrown light on the demands and conditions of the new monarchy, there could have been no David. He was only the step by which the latter mounted the throne, safe through the failures of his predecessors.

Saul—"The asked one"—belonged to the tribe of

Benjamin, which, even in the wilderness, had been the least numerous of the tribes, and had been almost destroyed by the stern punishment inflicted by the others for a flagrant crime.¹ Kish—"The archer"—his father, lived at Gibeah, in the hills of his clan, and was famous among them as a "mighty man for strength and prowess."² His son, Saul, was in middle life, with a son grown to manhood, but had no ambitious dreams of future greatness. His days were spent in the humble labours of the field: tending his father's beasts, or ploughing his fields.³

Meanwhile "the elders" of the people had been holding grave consultations respecting the future. Samuel was old, and as his sons were unworthy to succeed him, it seemed indispensable that a king be appointed over the nation, to preserve the union Samuel had so happily brought about, and to head the forces that might have to fight with the peoples round. They determined, therefore, to wait on Samuel, and ask him to choose a king for them.

The prophet had always held that the ancient theocracy was the only permissible form of government in Israel, and hence the demand for a change must have been very distasteful to him. There was, besides, enough to prompt caution, in the results of monarchy in neighbouring lands. It seemed to one so loyal to Jehovah as if the proposal to have a visible king was a kind of idolatry; a slight to the Almighty, who had guided His people like a flock by the hands of Moses and Aaron. With the utmost earnestness he pointed out the evils likely to rise, the encroachments on the public liberties, the increase of the national burdens, and the

¹ Judges xx., xxi.

² 1 Sam. ix. 1.

³ 1 Sam. ix. 3; xi. 5.

tyranny of lawless despotism. But his counsels could not change a desire which had been deepened by the miseries of generations, and he therefore yielded to what he could not prevent.

The choice of Saul came about apparently by the merest chance, though duly settled in Providence. The asses of Kish had strayed, and Saul had been sent to search for them. His efforts had failed, and he was on his way back, when his servant men, as they drew near Ramah, advised him to consult Samuel, if perhaps he, by his supernatural power, might aid them. A Divine premonition, however, had already been sent to Samuel, that the future king of Israel would come to him at such a time ; and there could be no question, when Saul presented himself, that he was intended. In a warlike age, and among a rude people, physical vigour and beauty seem the indispensable attributes of a leader ; and Saul was the most splendid man in all Israel. He was a " choice young man," says the sacred writer, " and a goodly : and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he : from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people." That night Saul was entertained by the prophet with special honour ; and next day he was secretly anointed as king. The gigantic Benjamite knew not what to think. Signs were vouchsafed to convince him of the Divine authority of Samuel ; but the honour was too sudden and great to be easily realized. Returning home, he went quietly to his farm-work again, and did not tell even his father what had happened.

A solemn assembly of the nation was soon after summoned at Mizpeh, by Samuel, for the public consecration of the king elect. Saul, aware that he would be brought forward as the Head of the Nation, shrank

from a dignity so unexpected, and so greatly above what one so obscure could ever have imagined as in store for him. When, at last, however, on search having been made, he was found and brought before the multitude, his splendid figure, so like a king's, conciliated the regards of the crowd; and for the first time, the shout rose in Israel, "God save the king."¹ It was not as yet, indeed, unanimous. That a member of so insignificant a tribe had been set over the nation roused the jealousy of some. The usual homage was paid by the mass, by the presentation of gifts; but it was seen that a party stayed away, and gave none. Saul, however, in this case, alike prudent and humble, held his peace, and went back to his labour on his father's farm. Meanwhile the justification of the demand for a king seemed to offer itself almost immediately. The Ammonites, under Nahash,—“The serpent,”—had attacked the town of Jabesh-gilead, in the tribe of Manasseh, across the Jordan, and had reduced the citizens to such extremities that they promised to surrender if not relieved in seven days. Summoning the tribes to Bezek, a day's march from the beleaguered town, it was presently relieved by a forced march and skilful dispositions; and all opposition to Saul was silenced. He had proved himself a valiant leader, such as the people desired. So great, indeed, was the enthusiasm, that the cry rose to put to death those who had not accepted him as king; but Saul, with equal wisdom and magnanimity, refused to stain his laurels with blood.

The aged prophet, to whom Israel owed so much, had no reason, so far, for repenting his having yielded to the popular wish. But he still had his fears, and called

¹ 1 Sam. x. 24.

another national assembly, for the double purpose of warning all against any breach of loyalty to Jehovah as the true invisible King; and of resigning his own office as judge, in favour of Saul. Thus the new king at last stood recognised by all as head of the nation.

With this confirmation of his dignity began a more marked assumption of royal state. Dismissing the general levy of the tribes, Saul retained three thousand men as a permanent body-guard, of whom two thousand attended himself at Bethel, and at Michmash, close by it, while one thousand were assigned to his son Jonathan at Gibeah. The territory of Benjamin was, thus, still the centre of government. The new kingdom, as yet, was little more than a name. The Philistines ruled the whole south, and must be driven out. A guerilla warfare was, therefore, at once begun against them, and ere long an earnest of future success was gained by the capture of their garrison in Geba, in the very heart of Benjamin. An instant invasion from the plains, to recover the ground thus lost, was the result, and the appearance of the dreaded enemy was a signal for the flight of the population; who, as of old, sought refuge in the caves and pits with which the country abounded. In the disarmed condition of the land, it was no easy task to drive out such a foe; for all smiths had been banished, lest they should make swords or spears, and even instruments of husbandry could be repaired only in the Philistine towns.¹

But Saul had a touch of the hero in his spirit, and would be kept back by no odds. His son Jonathan, moreover, was even more splendidly daring than himself, and compromised Israel so greatly with the enemy by his constantly harassing them, that the only hope of

¹ 1 S:m. xiii. 19.

longer national existence seemed to depend on the manhood of the land making a bold struggle for independence.

The able-bodied men of the country were therefore summoned once more ; this time to Gilgal. They proved, unfortunately, so dispirited, that Saul found it impossible to prevent desertions on a large scale. It was customary to offer sacrifices before beginning a war, to invoke the Divine aid in the approaching struggle ; and Samuel had promised to officiate. He could not come, however, for seven days, and Saul was to wait patiently for him till then. But the seventh day had almost ended without his appearing. By this time, "the people were scattered from Saul," and the whole force seemed likely to melt away. The delay had been designed. In the new monarchy it was a fundamental principle that political action should be subordinate to the intimation of the will of God through His prophets, without reference to human expediency or apparent necessity. In an evil hour for himself, Saul, distressed by the breaking up of his army, forgot this, or ignored it, and offered the sacrifices without waiting longer. Nothing could have been more disastrous. He had fatally transgressed the first condition on which he held the throne, for he had acted independently, as an ordinary ruler,—not, as he was, the mere officer of the Invisible King Jehovah. Samuel, therefore, at once announced on his coming, that this folly had forfeited the kingdom !

The brave heart of Saul was not, however, dismayed, even by so terrible an intimation. His force had dwindled to about six hundred men,¹ mostly without arms, except such as had been hidden in past times, or rude weapons extemporized for the occasion. Mean-

¹ 1 Sam. xiv. 2.

while, a splendid deed of daring on the part of Jonathan opened the campaign with a great success for Israel. Having stolen by night into the fortified camp of the Philistines, which was in the midst of Benjamin, a panic seized the garrison and made them rush against each other, in the belief that the Hebrews were upon them. Roused by the noise of the fight, Saul hastened to the spot, and pressed the enemy so closely that they fled in all directions.

Yet the victory was less complete than it might have been, through an incident which reveals a weak point in Saul's character—his rashness. He had invoked a curse on any one who tasted food that day, and not only "distressed" his troops by having done so, but compromised the safety of Jonathan, the darling of the nation, who had tasted some honey, in ignorance of his father's oath, and would have been put to death had not the soldiers intervened.

Saul had now reached the height of his fortunes. Campaigns, or raids, are mentioned afterwards, against Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other enemies, but they are dismissed briefly. Only one is given at any length—an attack on the robber-tribe of Amalekites in the south, which was the occasion of Saul's final rejection as king. Acting on his own judgment, he spared part of the booty and the sheik of the tribe. The offence was fatal. In stern words Samuel announced that the kingdom would pass from him, and intimated that he himself would come near him no more. A significant omen marked the sad interview, for Saul, having laid hold on Samuel's mantle, to keep him from leaving, the prophet tore himself away, and rent the mantle in doing so. "Thus," said Samuel, "hath Jehovah rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day."

The future history of Saul is a sad one. The excitement of the past and the gloom of the future, turning his brain, led to outbursts of insane passion, while jealousy of David, whom, perhaps, he had learned early to regard as his destined successor, filled his mind with the darkest suspicions.

He had been, in many respects, admirably suited for his times. At his accession Israel was crushed and helpless: he left it victorious far and near. Philistine, Ammonite, Moabite, Amalekite, and Syrian, by turns, found themselves defeated, and had to own the prowess of the new Hebrew leader. He, with his heroic son Jonathan, and his cousin and general, Abner, are among the greatest heroes of Israel. He showed his magnanimity in the clemency extended to those who resisted him at the opening of his reign, while the lament of the men of Jabesh-gilead over his death, and the loyalty of nearly all Israel to his house, after his fall, even to the length of fighting on its behalf, proves that he knew how to endear himself to the nation at large.

His death was indescribably touching. The Philistines, often defeated, had once more invaded the country as far as Esdraelon, the great battle-field of Palestine. A presentiment of disaster had meanwhile crept over Saul's heart, and in his excitement he sought the aid of unholy arts for counsel. The strange episode of his visit to Endor fitly led the way to the catastrophe. In the battle that followed, he and his heroic son, Jonathan, were slain, and their bodies carried off and exposed in triumph on the walls of the town of Bethshean. His head and his weapons were sent as trophies to the Philistine territory. But the gratitude of the men of Jabesh-gilead, whom he had once delivered from the Ammonite, could not endure that the

remains of heroes they so greatly honoured should be thus insulted, and, having carried them off by night, they buried them with due respect.

Thus perished, in darkness and gloom, the first king of Israel, after his bright and triumphant rise.



COSTUMES OF MOSLEM PEASANTRY, NEAR SHECHEM. - Captain Conder, R.E.



DAVID THE SHEPHERD.

AMONG the illustrious names of Scripture no one holds a higher place than that of David, the poet-king of Israel.

It is hard to realize the remote antiquity of David's age. The earliest Grecian chronology does not commence till nearly two hundred years later, and it was not till as long after his day that Rome made its first humble beginnings in some shepherds' huts on the Palatine Hill. Western civilization, in the historical sense, was as yet in the distant future; for David's reign opened and closed in the eleventh century before Christ.

To estimate his character and position it should be remembered that he rose at a period of intense national excitement. The desire to secure such a political organization as would guarantee independence, had been forced on all the tribes of Israel by the long and terrible experience of the age of the Judges, till it had penetrated all classes, and had roused them to a self-sacrificing, heroic effort to shake off the yoke of the heathen, under which they had hitherto lain. The struggle, however, demanded leaders, and from this sprang the introduction of monarchy, notwithstanding the temporary opposition of Samuel, the revered Judge and Prophet of the nation.

Among the many splendid names this period has left, no one shines so conspicuously as that of David. Patriotism had been kindled by a newly-awakened religious fervour. A sense of the dignity and special designation of Israel, as "the people of God," among the nations of the earth, had been called forth and fostered by Samuel. Loyalty to Jehovah, as the national and only true God, and zeal for His law and ordinances, had risen to a wide-spread enthusiasm, which demanded that the new political constitution should be in harmony with theocratic ideas; a constitution in which all the special Divine institutions granted to Israel might develop themselves freely, alongside the leadership of a recognised human king. Of this spirit of the age David proved himself the supreme embodiment.

The newly-erected monarchy already provided a form in which the popular and theocratic ideas could unfold themselves harmoniously; but Saul, with all his devotion to the political wants of the nation, had shown no sympathy for its religious requirements, and had thus proved that he was not the man to work the new constitution rightly, or secure its success, by fostering and attracting towards him the spiritual qualities of the nation. In David the national ideas were first peacefully and fully realized. In him the right man appeared at the right hour, to satisfy all the well-founded demands of his age; and, at the same time, to reap the fruits of all that Samuel and Saul had sown. He was the first to understand and carry out the true idea of the king of a theocracy, and he pointed out to his successors the course they should follow.)

No gifts of genius, or proofs of bravery, prudence, or wisdom, would have sufficed to enable him to fill such a

part, if he had not, also, been marked out for it by the special and recognised designation of God. It was as His Anointed, whose life, as such, had from the first been under the watchful care of Providence, that he commanded the homage of the nation to the extent to which it was yielded him.

David was born in the mountain village of Bethlehem, in the tribe of Judah; the youngest son, and perhaps the youngest child, of a large family. His father, Jesse, was the grandson of Ruth the Moabitess, and the descendant of Rahab of Jericho, so that heathen blood ran in the veins of his famous son from two different sources. It required three generations for the descendants of aliens to become members of Israel, and thus David could be reckoned a full Jew, though his father still stood in a measure outside the congregation.

The family seem to have been the chief house of Bethlehem—and as it were the feudal lords of the village and the district round it; for “the elders” of the community appear at the yearly feast of Jesse’s household, and David, in after years, gave a grant of land in the neighbourhood, as of his own right, to Chimham, the son of his friend Barzillai.¹

The name of David’s mother has not been recorded, but we have her illustrious son’s testimony that she was a godly woman, for he twice expressly speaks of her as a “handmaid” of Jehovah.² Could it, indeed, have been doubted, even had he not done so, that he owed his early religiousness to her who had the training of his infancy, or that he is another gift of a mother’s piety to the Church of God! The very name she gave him—

¹ 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 4, 5; xx. 6; 2 Sam. xix. 37, 38; Jer. xli. 17.

² Ps. lxxxvi. 16; cxvi. 16.

David—her “Darling”—tells the story of his early years; how he clung to her as only a youngest child can, drank in her words, and reflected her gifts and graces. He may have taken his hero-soul from his father, but I cannot help thinking that, like so many other poets and saints, he owed his intellectual and spiritual greatness to his mother.

The steep sides of the Bethlehem hill, terraced with vines and olives, then as now; the well at the gate of the town, with its cool clear water rising through the grey limestone; the upland downs stretching away to Hebron on the south, and to the wilderness on the east; and the sweet valley below the town, with its barley fields and its brooks, saw David rise through childhood to youth. Like all true-hearted men, he never lost a tender recollection of these early days, for after long years we find him, in the midst of the dangers of a fierce war, going back in thought to the Bethlehem well, and longing to drink its cool water, which had refreshed him so often in boyhood.

The first appearance of David in the sacred story introduces us also to his whole family. It was the custom in Jesse's household to keep a feast yearly, perhaps as a half-religious service, or at the first new moon of the year. Jessie himself apparently presided, with the elders of the town. The company were in the midst of their festivity, when they were suddenly alarmed by the appearance of Samuel, driving a heifer before him, and bearing a horn of consecrating oil.¹ The object of his visit was unknown, and as the prophet might have been sent to announce the displeasure of God at some public or private offence, it was not till he assured them he came peaceably that their fears abated.

¹ 1 Sam. xvi. 1-3.

They were not, indeed, left long in suspense. Summoning them to attend the sacrifice of the heifer, Samuel caused the different sons of Jesse to pass successively before him. Eliab—"God is my Father"—the eldest son, seemed, by his height and commanding appearance, the object of the prophet's mission, but the prophet was held back by a Divine intimation from anointing him. The King of Israel was no longer to be chosen simply for physical beauty or strength. Son after son passed without any notice taken of them by Samuel, till, at the question if there were no other, David was brought from watching sheep on the neighbouring pastures. On him the anointing oil was forthwith poured, as a sacred intimation that he was hereafter to be King of Israel. It is no wonder that an act so significant greatly affected its subject, or that, in the words of Scripture, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."

Incidental notices enable us to realize the appearance of the future king at this crisis in his career. He was only of ordinary stature, if not under it, and in this respect very different from the gigantic Saul, or his own elder brother, Eliab. The open air of the steppes had browned his skin to a glowing ruddiness, and his hair, of a reddish brown, hung down in rich profusion. In later years he wore a beard, but it may not have grown when he was anointed.¹ His eyes were especially fine, and as a whole he was signally handsome.² His strength and agility were such as we might have expected from the free mountain life he had led. Like his nephew Asahel, he was very swift of foot, for he compares his speed to that of the hind;³ and he

¹ 1 Sam. xxi. 13.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 12, 18; xvii. 42.

³ Ps. xviii. 33.

was so strong that he could break a bow of steel.¹ He carried a stick in his hand to guide his sheep, or drive off the dogs and wild beasts,² and a wallet for his day's food.³

In the quiet meditative life of a shepherd he had been unconsciously training for greater things. Moses had been educated by the stillness and self-communion of a shepherd's life, for ruling Israel. In the same way, the greatness of nature around and over David, the silence of the hills, the self-reliance taught by the danger of a shepherd life, and the very leisure it gave him, were of the greatest moment in fitting him for the future. In constant intercourse with the wonders of creation, his impressible nature drank in their manifold lessons. Living among his flocks for months together, and often in conflict with lions and bears, he confirmed his physical strength. Nor was the loneliness without its effect, amidst its toils and dangers, in kindling that love of daring, amounting to rashness, that afterwards marked him, and drew on him the reproof of his elder brothers.

Above all, it fostered the strong trust in God and the calm bravery which distinguished him through life. It was among the hills, moreover, with their many idle hours, that the shepherd arts of singing and playing were gradually cultivated to a pitch that early made him famous, and was of priceless value in later years in connection with his own religious life ; and of still more worth to all future generations, by the creations it helped to call forth. No wonder that the greatness of the elevation he experienced was so deeply impressed on him that in his old age, in his last words, he speaks

¹ Ps. xviii. 34.

² 1 Sam. xvii. 40, 43.

³ 1 Sam. xvii. 40.

of himself as "the man who was raised up on high;"¹ or that he often alludes to himself as taken from the sheepcote, or chosen from the people

His fame as a player on the harp was the first cause of his coming in contact with public life, and thus, strangely, of his future elevation to the throne. His genius for music and for improvisation had spread beyond Bethlehem to the court of Saul, in Benjamin; and as the power of melodious sounds to calm the paroxysms of insanity was, even then, well known, it led to his being sent for by Saul to play before him. The reason of the unhappy king had given way under the influence of his elevation and of the judgment of Samuel on him for his failure. Feeling that his hopes of founding a dynasty were lost, he had fallen a prey to high nervous excitement, which the dangers and responsibilities of constant war, and the giddiness of a rude grandeur, so new to him, day by day increased.

David's introduction to Saul discloses the general estimate formed of the young shepherd. "But the Spirit of Jehovah," says the sacred record, "departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him. And the servants of Saul said unto him, An evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, who are before thy face, to seek out a man who is a cunning player upon an harp; and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is cunning in playing,

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

and a mighty valiant man, and a warrior, and wise in speech, and comely in person. Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, who is with the sheep."

It is uncertain whether any of the Psalms can be referred to this period of David's life. It seems as if the twenty-third, from its pastoral imagery and its charming simplicity, may be a reminiscence of these early years, and if so, it throws light on the deep religious feelings of David's youth. To have written thus while still so young, speaks of a heart which, from boyhood, had been filled with a high sensibility towards all things sacred. How much, how deeply, and how tenderly must a heart have pondered the great realities of life and death to have had such pictures rise before it as this Psalm presents. How familiarly must the thoughts have gone upwards to the Eternal, to realize that He is the shepherd of men, as men are of weak and foolish sheep!

The eighth Psalm seems to bring David before us when, like the shepherds of after ages, on the same downs, he was "abiding in the field, keeping watch over his flock by night." The splendour of the Syrian skies, with the white moon and the radiant stars, shone down inspiration into his soul, already touched by the Spirit of God. The glorious majesty of the Eternal contrasted, in the thoughtful mind that gazed on them, with the weakness of man, while His surpassing goodness to our race was no less enforced on it by the reflection, that to a being so feeble should have been granted dominion over all nature, stretching round in its endless forms and powers. Nor was there wanting the thought, born of humility, that this mighty God chose for His glory the weakest instrument to still the enemy and the aven-

ger—chose them, as He had chosen David himself, a stripling, to receive the anointing oil.

The nineteenth Psalm, also, seems to breathe the influences of these simple years, celebrating as it does the splendours of day, as the other had sung the glories of the night. The same profoundly religious nature marks both. The moon and the stars had raised thoughts of God, and now the mighty sun filled the heart with reflections on “the Law of the Lord,” which was still more glorious than the brightness of the far shining day, in its enlightening the eyes of the soul.

The twenty-ninth Psalm may well have been composed after one of the sublime thunder-storms of which David must have seen so many in his shepherd life:—

The voice of Jehovah is above the waters,
The God of glory thundereth;
Jehovah sits upon many waters;
The voice of Jehovah is mighty!
The voice of Jehovah is full of majesty!
The voice of Jehovah breaks the cedars,
Yea, Jehovah breaks the cedars of Lebanon,
And makes them to leap like calves,—
Lebanon and Sirion like young buffaloes!
The voice of Jehovah divides the flames of fire;
The voice of Jehovah makes the wilderness tremble;
Jehovah makes the Kadesh-waste to tremble;
The voice of Jehovah makes the hinds to bring forth,
And strips the woods of their leaves!
Meanwhile, in His palace
Every one proclaims His glory.
Jehovah rules the mighty flood,
Thus rules Jehovah as the Eternal King!
Jehovah will give strength to His people;
Jehovah will bless His people with peace.



GOLIATH.

THE vigorous efforts of Israel to free itself from foreign domination had resulted, in the early youth of David, in an equally determined struggle on the part of their most powerful enemies, the Philistines, to crush them still more effectually. Nor was it easy for a disarmed people, cowed by long subjugation, to resist successfully so rich and powerful a race, flushed with long continued victory.

The stock to which the Philistines belonged—whether Asiatic or African—has been keenly disputed. Some writers trace them to a Coptic or African immigration from the island of Crete; others suppose they were a branch of the Shepherd or Hyksos tribes who for a time overran Egypt in the patriarchal age, and were afterwards expelled.

Be that as it may, in the time of Abraham we find them settled in the extreme south of Palestine, as a pastoral clan, living, apparently in tents, near Gerar.¹

At the date of the Exodus they had laid aside this early simplicity, having grown into a powerful nation, holding the rich coast plain, from the extreme south of the land, northwards² to Ekron, and organized as a confederation of strong cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Askelon,

¹ Gen. xxi. 32, 34; xxvi. 1, 6.

² Josh. xiii. 3.

Gath, and Ekron. The natural richness of their territory, famous even then for its corn-fields, vineyards, and olive groves, as it is now for its figs and oranges, and varied fruits; and its position on the great thoroughfare between Phœnicia and Syria on the north, and Egypt and Arabia on the south—secured the material prosperity of the community. Nor must we forget that the wealth and civilization of the Egyptians and Phœnicians in these ages must have been great, even by our standards. The splendour of a monarchy which could cover the valley of the Nile with Temples and Pyramids, and extend its sway over distant lands, implies development in many directions: nor is it without grounds that Humboldt speaks of the Phœnician flag as known and respected in those early times, in Britain and the Indian Ocean.

The Philistines were at once warlike, and given to commerce: in contrast to their Northern Phœnician neighbours, who were wedded to the maxim of peace at any price, to avoid the disturbance of their far-reaching enterprises of gain. They traded in slaves with Edom and Southern Arabia,¹ and appear to have had both a mercantile and war navy.² Their advancement in the pursuits of industry is implied in the sacred record, for we find them skilful as smiths and armourers, noted as builders, and even for the arts of the founder and goldsmith.³

Their dangerous power as enemies of Israel is sufficiently to be judged from the fact, that in the time of Gideon, or shortly after, they engaged in successful war with the people of Sidon, and forced them to transfer their capital from that city to a more secure position

¹ Amos i. 6; Joel iii. 3.

² Isa. xi. 14. (Sept.)

³ Judges xvi. 5, 18; 1 Sam. xiii. 20; xvii. 5, 6.

on the island of Tyre. Nor were they afraid, in alliance with other Mediterranean nations, to attack even the colossal power of Egypt, for we find them embroiled in a naval war with Rameses III. about this period.

In those ages no thought of peace or quiet neighbourhood between different communities was ever imagined, except when a special treaty enforced it. To use Mommsen's figure—of any two powers, one must be the hammer and the other the anvil. Unfortunately, in the case of Israel, tribal disunion made them, for hundreds of years, the latter.

The system pursued by the Philistines in their oppression of their Hebrew neighbours was to make frequent raids into the upland valleys, stripping them of their harvest and vintage, and carrying off any of the population they could capture, to sell them in foreign markets as slaves. No wonder that the Israelites hid in caves and rock cisterns, and all other concealments. These forays were sometimes extended to the whole hill-country, as far as the Jordan valley, where they could prevent a union of the tribes of the opposite sides of the river, and also hinder fugitives from returning, to take up arms against them afresh. We find them at one time posted at Michmash, in Benjamin, and at another passing over the plain of Esdraelon to Gilboa. Their fierce energy kept the Hebrews in constant dread, and in the end demoralized them so completely, that even their smiths were forbidden to work, lest they should thus obtain arms. They had sunk so low, indeed, as to stoop to assist their tyrants, and hand over to them any hero who might aspire to free them.¹

The first efforts for liberty of which we have any

¹ Judges xv. 12.

notice are those of one Shamgar, the son of Anath ; the next those of Samson ; but neither of these brave spirits succeeded in kindling popular enthusiasm sufficiently to secure more than local and passing results. They aroused the expiring hopes of the nation, however, and, it may well be, helped to inspire the then youthful Samuel with that high resolution to restore the honour of his race, which led to its final triumph and greatness. Defeated under Eli, twenty years later, Israel, nevertheless, found itself victor on the great day of Mizpeh, and for perhaps the first time since the days of Joshua, more than three hundred years before, could raise a pillar at Ebenezer in commemoration of its success.

The signal victory of Saul at Geba was the next step in the war of liberation, and was felt so keenly by the Philistines, that for twenty-five years they made no fresh effort to regain their lost power. Meanwhile, the Israelites had gained so much confidence that they no longer relied on the strength of inland defiles, but marched out to meet the enemy in the broad valley of the Terebinth, on the slopes leading to the low country, fourteen miles south-west of Jerusalem.

It was on this occasion that we read of Goliath and his fatal encounter with David. The two hostile camps had been pitched on the opposite sides of the open wady, through which a torrent ran in winter, though it was dry, now, in summer. The place had an ill name ; for it was known not only as the valley of the Terebinth, but as Ephes-dammim—"the bloody border-march." The Philistines had, among their chief men, some members of a family of gigantic size, very likely descended from the old race, noted for their great physical strength and their stature.¹ One of the num-

¹ Deut. ii. 20, 21 ; 2 Sam. xxi. 22.

ber, Goliath—"The exile"—was the special champion of their host, and had already, morning and evening, for forty days, defied the army of Israel to send any one to meet him in single combat, and thus decide the matter between the two peoples. His huge bulk, his glittering arms, and his great voice, rolling out his challenge, had, for a time, cowed the Hebrews, and paralysed them beyond the power of spirited action. Saul alone had complete armour; the army at large was well-nigh defenceless; no one would dare to meet the giant.

At this juncture David was sent to the camp by his father, with ten loaves, ten slices of milk-cheese, and some roasted or parched corn, for the chief of the "thousand" in which his three elder brothers were serving, under Saul. He was still his father's shepherd; but joyfully accepting the command, hastened in the early morning to the camp. As he entered the circle of wagons drawn round the tents as a rude protection, he found that all the force had marched out to take up their position, over against the enemy. Presently the loud war-cry rose, and he hurried to the point, at once to be with his brothers and to see the foe. He had scarcely reached the lines, however, before the gigantic Philistine once more stalked out from the ranks; and with a voice that sent dismay into all hearts but that of the young lad, again defied any one in the host of Israel to mortal combat. Amidst the general terror, David heard that the king had promised his daughter in marriage, and great honours besides, to any one who accepted the Philistine's challenge; and, moreover, his better feelings were shocked by the insult offered to the "armies of the living God." His brother Eliab in vain tried to silence him; he, stripping

as he was, would go and beard the huge foe, and gain honour to Israel.

His words having at last reached Saul, he was brought before him, but only to be discredited as no match for so gigantic an adversary. The hero-spirit of the lad, however, knew no fear. He had overcome lions and bears, he said, and he would slay this uncircumcised Philistine as he had slain them. The God who had delivered him from the fierce beasts would deliver him in this danger also.

His earnestness gradually had its way. He might go, but would it not be better for him to wear Saul's armour? It was, however, too large for him, and too heavy. He had a plan of his own.

Stepping out in front of the line, in his simple shepherd's dress, with only his crook in his hand, his sling, and the wallet in which he carried his daily food, David calmly went towards the heathen champion. As he crossed the bottom of the wady, however, he picked up a few smoothly-rounded pebbles, and put them in his bag at his side. The indignation of the huge warrior at a defiance from such a foe was unbounded. Was he a dog, that the boy should come to him to drive him off with a stick in his hand? Let the child come near, and he would give his flesh to the vultures and the jackals.

But now the sling did its unerring work. A stone from it stunned the boaster, and as he fell insensible, in a moment, David was over his body, and bore off his head, severed by his own huge sword, which the victor also carried off! Terror passed from Israel to its enemies at the sight, and a signal victory hurled back the invaders to their plains.

In the Greek Bible there is a Psalm added to those

in our version. It bears the title, "This is the Psalm of David's own writing," and though doubtless a later composition, it sums up with a vivid clearness the story of this great event in the hero's life. "I was small among my brethren, and the youngest in my father's house. I was feeding my father's sheep. My hands made a harp, and my fingers fitted a psaltery. And who shall tell it to my Lord? He is the Lord, He heareth! He sent His angel and took me from my father's flocks, and anointed me with the oil of His anointing. My brethren were beautiful and tall, but the Lord was not well pleased with them. I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols. But I drew his own sword and beheaded him, and took away the reproach from the children of Israel."

The consequences of this splendid deed were momentous. As the army returned from the field, songs greeted David as having slain his ten thousands, while Saul was honoured as having slain only his thousands. The mind of the king, already shaken, was filled with jealousy at such honour paid to another; and though he was forced to bring David to court, and pay him outward respect, it was too clear that he looked on him as his rival and possible supplanter. From this time till the catastrophe on Mount Gilboa, David's life was in constant peril, through a period of many years, for at Saul's death he was a man of thirty. At one moment in the presence of the king, we find him the next hiding in rocks, caves, fastnesses, and woods, a fugitive in imminent danger of his life. But all this discipline was fitting him for the great work to which no fewer than forty years of his life were to be devoted—the settling and extending the throne of his nation as the chosen people of God.



DAVID THE PSALMIST.

AFTER the great event of the overthrow of Goliath, David passed from the quiet life of the pastures to the more exciting and splendid, but also more dangerous sphere, of an attendant on Saul. Appointed at first as the king's armour-bearer,¹ he presently rose to be a captain over "a thousand," which was the name given to a sub-division of a tribe. Ere long, however, on his marriage with Saul's daughter Michal, he was promoted to be captain of the king's body-guard,² and thus became one of the three intimate associates of Saul—Jonathan the heir apparent, and Abner, being the others.

His time was now largely divided between the risks of war with the Philistines, and the occupation of minstrel at court, to soothe the increasing insanity of Saul. But his position, however honourable, was little to be envied, for the jealousy of the king grew more murderous daily, and not a few round were willing to aid him in his thirst for the hero's life. It has been thought that Psalms vi. and vii. belong to this period, and if so, they throw light on his inner life at this time. In the former he sighs before God in his troubles. He is in dread of being put to death: his fears break him

¹ 1 Sam. xvi. 21; xviii. 2.

² 1 Sam. xviii. 4.

down into the deepest nervous dejection, and his one refuge and comfort is to pour forth his sorrows into the ears of that God who, he knows, "will receive his prayer." The other is the utterance of a full heart at the thought of the plots of one of Saul's tribesmen and followers—Cush, the Benjamite. He is like to tear the singer's soul to pieces : he is incessantly planning snares for him, and acts as the leader of a host of enemies who continually seek to destroy him. David pleads his uprightness; his desire for peace; his having returned good for evil, and cries to Jehovah to whet His sword, to bend, or tread, His bow and make it ready, and to lift Himself up against the suppliant's enemies. Still, in his troubles, his hope is in the Lord his God.

David escaped at last from the court by the fidelity of his wife Michal and of Jonathan, and fled to Ramah, to Samuel, whom he now saw, apparently for the first time since the prophet had anointed him in his boyhood. His future course was as yet unsettled. He still hoped to resume his place in Saul's train, but a secret interview with Jonathan convinced him that this was impossible. The king's jealousy had finally settled into a morbid dread of him, which put his life in imminent danger. He therefore fled to Nob to consult the Divine oracle, and having there got possession of the sword of Goliath, determined to throw himself on the generosity of the national enemy, Achish, king of the Philistines. At Gath, however, his presence roused such feeling that he was apprehended,¹ and only escaped by counterfeiting madness, which, being regarded as conferring sacred and almost inspired immunity, secured his life, and caused his peaceful dismissal. The thirty-fourth and fifty-sixth Psalms are assigned by their titles to

¹ Title of Psalm lvi.

this period, and show a striking contrast between the troubled outer circumstances of the moment, and the serene composure of the heart within. He is the poor man who has cried to Jehovah, and been delivered by him out of all his troubles. Nothing could be finer than his confidence in God :—

Yes, fear Jehovah, ye His saints,
For to those fearing Him is no want !
Helpless, the lions hunger, famishing ;
But those who seek Jehovah, want nothing good.
Let me exhort you, ye sons :
The fear of Jehovah will I teach you.
Wouldst thou in life have joy ?
Wouldst thou have good for many days ?
Keep thy tongue in restraint from evil :
Thy lips from speaking deceit :
Shun evil continually : do good :
Seek peace with thy whole soul !
Jehovah's eyes are on the upright :
His ears are open to their cry.

He feels that there are many trials in the life of the best, but that they are all overruled :—

Countless are the sorrows of the godly,
Yet Jehovah delivers them from them all.
All their limbs are counted ;
Not one of them shall be broken.
The wicked perishes by his own wickedness ;
The haters of the upright come to grief :
Jehovah draws to Himself the souls of His servants,
None ever regret having trusted in Him.

The fifty-sixth Psalm is no less illustrative of the depth and grandeur of David's soul in its religious feelings. It is a cry of distress amidst sore troubles, but, withal, of unclouded confidence in Jehovah.

Be merciful to me, O God, for men snort (in rage) at me :
Daily my enemies threaten me.
My accusers snort fiercely at me daily,
Many strive against me bitterly.

When I am in fear
I flee to Thee, my Trust !
In God I make my glory, and in His promises :
My trust is in God, and I have no fear.
What can dying men do against me ?

He then details his trials. His words are wrested to evil : every thought of his enemies is for his hurt : they dog his steps : they lay snares for him : they pant for his life. But he has a sure Refuge :—

My wandering life Thou hast noted :
Lay up my tears in Thy bottle ;
Yea, they already are marked by Thee !
My enemies are turned back when I cry to Thee :
I know that God stands by me.
In God I glory—in His promise :
In Jehovah I glory—in His promise !
In God I trust, and have no fear ;
What can man do to me ?
Thy vows, O God, are on me :
I must pay Thee my offering of thanks !
For Thou deliverest me from death ;
My feet, also, from stumbling,
That I may walk before God in the land of the living,

After a short stay at Gath, David fled to the wilderness, to follow, for a time, the wild life of an outlaw. His first retreat was the cave of Adullam, recently identified by Captain Claude Conder of the Palestine Survey. There his whole family joined him, in terror of Saul. He soon found himself, moreover, at the head of a band of broken and outlawed men, willing to cast in their lot with his, in the wilderness around. Ere

long, however, he had to flee once more : this time to some stronghold in the neighbourhood of Engedi—the Goat-fountain—at the Dead Sea. Taking his aged parents with him, he transferred them to the care of the King of Moab, to whom his own Moabitish blood, through Ruth, perhaps recommended him. Nahash—“The serpent”—king of Ammon, was also friendly. The prophet Gad, who afterwards wrote his life,¹ came to him while here, and henceforth was closely connected with him, and his followers were increased by a band of eleven mountaineers from Gad, over the Jordan, who swam the river in flood-time to join him, and by a number of men from Judah and Benjamin, under his nephew Amasa.²

From the shores of the Dead Sea, precipitous and strong though they were, David ere long fled again to the forest of Hareth, in the now bare hills of Judah. There he once more encountered the Philistines, attacked their marauding parties, and relieved and took possession of the town of Keilah. Here he was joined by Abiathar, the last survivor of Eli’s house. He brought the High Priest’s ephod, and henceforth gave David the oracles which he sorely craved. The four hundred men of the cave of Adullam had now swelled to six hundred.

Meanwhile the fury of Saul increased, so that David had again to flee and dismiss his band. It is impossible to follow his wanderings, but enough is told us to show that he was literally hunted like a partridge on the mountains. At one time we find him in the wilderness of Ziph,—no doubt a part of that of Judah,—and he is all but taken through the treachery of the people.

¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

² 1 Chron. xii. 14–18.

Then he flees to the wilderness of Maôn in the far south, where, through Saul being called away by the news of a Philistine invasion, he escapes down one side of a hill as his pursuers climb the other. We have a third glimpse of him again at Engedi, where Saul enters the very cave in which he is hiding; and a fourth shows him creeping into Saul's camp at night and carrying off the long spear and the cruse of water which were at the door of the king's tent. Immediately after, he has his final interview with Saul.

Psalms liv., lxiii., and cxliii., are assigned to this period. Betrayed by the Ziphites, he finds time to breathe out his troubles in prayer and expressions of trust, which show him to have been at all times the same, in his confidence in God and lofty communion with Him:—

Save me, O God, by Thy might,
And avenge me by Thy power!
Hear my prayer, O God,
Give ear to the words of my mouth!
For a strange people have risen against me,
The blood-thirsty seek my life:
They have not God before their eyes.

Behold, God is my helper;
The Lord is the protector of my life!
He shall avenge the wickedness of my enemies:
According to Thy faithfulness, Lord, destroy them!
With a willing heart will I offer to Thee,
And praise Thy name, for it is good,
Because He has delivered me from all my enemies;
My eyes shall feed on my foes!

The sixty-third Psalm is one of the most touching in the Psalter. Who does not remember its cry from the heart, at his exile from the sanctuary?—

Jehovah ! Thee, my God, seek I ;
After Thee thirsts my soul, and my body pines,
In a dry, and desolate, waterless land !
Would that I could behold Thy sanctuary,
To see Thy majesty and Thy glory ;
For better is Thy favour than life :
My lips would fain praise Thee there !

Psalms cxlii. speaks of his spirit being overwhelmed within him, but even then he feels that Jehovah knows his paths. He is brought very low ; his persecutors are stronger than he. God alone is his refuge and portion in the land of the living. He is still trustful, however dark his lot !

For sixteen months more David had to live as he best could. Returning to Achish, at Gath, he got from him the command of the border town of Ziklag, and there he maintained himself till the death of Saul at the battle of Gilboa.

He was now king, but for seven years and a half ruled, at Hebron, over little more than the territory of Judah. Meanwhile his power grew, and that of the house of Saul, under Ishbosheth, slowly faded, till at last David was, in reality as well as name, monarch of the whole nation, and transferred his capital to Jerusalem, then just taken from the Jebusites.

The consecration of the new seat of government as a sanctuary of God is minutely detailed. An assembly of the nation was convened, great sacrifices offered, musical rejoicings and sacred dances played a great part, and David, dressed in a priestly ephod, united the dignities of king and priest. The Tabernacle, moreover, was set up in the city, and the Ark brought to it from the house of Obed-edom.

No fewer than eleven Psalms refer more or less fully

to this great solemnity. The twenty-ninth Psalm has the title, in the Greek Bible, of "The going forth of the Tabernacle;" the thirtieth is a "Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David;" while the fifteenth proclaims the spirit and conduct necessary in those who proposed to worship in the Holy Tent, or take up their dwelling on the holy hill on which the new city stood. The twenty-fourth seems to be the ode written for the bringing up of the Ark to the sanctuary:—

Lift up your heads, ye gates,
Be ye lifted up, ye doors,
That the King of Glory may come in!

"Who is the King of Glory?"
Jehovah, the mighty and strong,
Jehovah, the mighty in battle.

Lift up, ye gates, your heads,
Be lifted up, ye everlasting doors,
That the King of Glory may enter in!

"Who is the King of Glory?"
Jehovah, the God of Hosts:
He is the King of Glory.

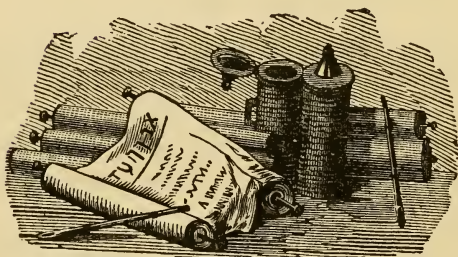
From the entry to Jerusalem dates the rise of the kingdom to its wide and splendid greatness. But amidst all the seductions of state and the occupations of government or war, David still found time, and showed the inclination, to sing as of old in celebration of each great event as it occurred.

The character of David is seen in its fulness only when his Psalms are thoughtfully studied. The influences of his age might lead him to acts which the higher morality of Christianity and even that of Moses condemn, but his repentant sorrow, his persistent struggle towards the right after every failure, his frank con-

fession of his guilt, his grand trust in the mercy of God, and his instinctive communion with Him, have made the Psalter, in every age, the book most read of all the Old Testament Canon. We do not know how many Psalms are from David himself, but he stamped his spirit on all, and as the inspired poet of the Jewish Church, he has left the Church Universal a legacy of priceless worth for all ages.



CASE FOR A BOOK-ROLL.



BOOK-ROLLS AND WRITING APPARATUS.



ABSALOM.

THE earlier life of David is free from the blemishes that, here and there, mark his later years. As with too many of us, the hurtful influences of prosperity more than once led to acts from which his humbler days were free. Like the traveller in the fable, he yielded to a gentler influence what he had held fast against force and trial.

That he thus proved himself, as we all do, a contrast and contradiction of natures, is a warning against the opposite estimates often advanced of his character as a whole. By a false conception of the expression used respecting him, that he was "a man after God's own heart,"¹ he has been held up by some as an almost faultless saint, while others have taken occasion from his sins to find imaginary difficulty in the phrase. He has been, by turns, regarded as one of the best and one of the worst of men; but, as in many other cases, extremes err on both sides. It is only as a faithful theocratic sovereign, in contrast to Saul, that he is held up as thus pleasing to God; not, as to his moral character. Saul had presumed to act for himself, independently of the prophet Samuel, who spoke for God, the true King, and he had cared only for the political interests of

¹ 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

the nation, not supremely for the religious. In these respects David proved a contrast to him, and so far as his conception of the duties of a king over Israel, and his loyalty to it, were concerned, was a man after God's own heart.

To gain a true estimate of him, it is above all things necessary to realize his position and time : to remember what monarchy was in the neighbouring countries, and, withal, never to forget that if he sinned deeply, he showed the noblest trait man can offer, in his lowly and sincere repentance. "David, the Hebrew king," says Thomas Carlyle, "had fallen into sins enough ; blackest crimes ; there was no want of sin. And thereupon the unbelievers sneer and ask, Is this your man according to God's heart? The sneer, I must say, seems to me but a shallow one. What are faults, what are the outward details of a life, if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often baffled, never-ended struggle of it be forgotten? 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' Of all acts, is not, for a man, *repentance* the most Divine? The deadliest sin, I say, were that same supercilious consciousness of no sin :—that, is death ; the heart so conscious is divorced from sincerity, humility, and fact ; is dead : it is 'pure' as dead dry sand is pure. David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, down as into entire wreck : yet a struggle never ended ; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew."¹ The story

¹ *On Heroes*, p. 43.

of Absalom brings before us at once the sins, the punishment, and the sorrow of his father.

After the death of Saul, David assumed the dignity of king, but for more than seven years it was rather that of Judah alone,—the tribe to which he belonged, and which hence rallied heartily round him,—than of Israel as a whole. The friends of the house of Saul had set up one of that monarch's sons, Ishbosheth, whose original name, Esh-baal¹—"Baal's man"—throws light on the religious feelings of Saul's household. He reigned on the east of the Jordan, but his career ended, after a desultory civil war, in his murder, without David's knowledge.

On this, David was anointed king for the third time, amidst wide public rejoicings. His retainers, now swollen to a host, were entrusted to his nephew Joab; every tribe sending a contingent. The tribe of Levi, headed by the aged Jehoiada, the High Priest, rallied round him, and, in all outward respects, he had become prosperous and powerful.

The growth of his power, however, was marked by two evils; one of which he could not help, while in the case of the other, he was himself wholly to blame. His kinsmen and chief officers ere long grew too strong to be held in due control, and sorely tried him by their ferocious lawlessness. But this would have been less hurtful than it became, but for David following the example of neighbouring kings, in forming a harem, with the inevitable result of family feuds and troubles. Even in Hebron, besides the two wives of his wilderness life, he had taken five more.

The capture of Jerusalem, the transference of the seat of government to it, the lengthened and imposing

¹ 1 Chron. viii. 33; ix. 39.

solemnities of the erection of a new tabernacle for the ark, and the bringing that sacred palladium to the new capital, marked the close of the humbler southern kingship and the rise of the grander rule of subsequent years. From this time, conquest extended the dominions of Israel on every side, till they reached from the valley of the Lebanon to the head of the Red Sea, and from the Mediterranean to the deserts of the Euphrates. A temporary reverse of the rising Assyrian empire, which left the field open to the vigour and ability of David, has, strangely enough, been discovered in these last years, from the tablets found in the ruins of Nineveh.

David was now a king, in some degree on the scale of the Oriental monarchies of Egypt or the Euphrates, and organized his government after their pattern, so far as the theocratic constitution permitted. (To the seven wives he had at Hebron he added ten more, with a number of concubines, to increase his state, and his financial and military schemes extended in proportion. But the evils of polygamy were before long to show themselves, and unhappily they found an opportunity to do so in connection with a grievous sin on the part of David himself.

His first wife, Abinoam of Jezreel, had borne him a son named Amnon, who, having grown to manhood, in these years, had done a great wrong to his half-sister, Tamar,—the Palm—the child of Maacah, a captive of war from Geshur, in the wild region of the Ledja, across the Jordan—a daughter, thus, of the old heathen native race. Besides Tamar she had a son, Absalom, who was hence Tamar's full brother, and on him fell what was deemed the sacred duty of avenging his sister's wrong, if David as king failed to do so.

But David had, for we know not how long, been ill at ease in his own heart; and even apart from his habitual weakness with his family, was ill prepared to punish sin in a son, which, with all its hatefulness, wanted the worst features of the guilt weighing on his own conscience. He had taken Bathsheba into his harem, like a common Eastern despot; and, as if he had known no better than the kings round him, had virtually murdered her husband to get her. This grievous scandal had brought on him the stern rebuke of the prophet Nathan. Henceforth "the sword would never depart from his house;" he had despised God, and would have to bear a terrible punishment.

In all Eastern races family injuries must be avenged by the head of the house; or, if he fail in his duty, by the nearest relative. [Jacob's sons had avenged the wrong done to their sister, Dinah; and as David, at once weak towards his children, and crippled by his own guilty conscience, would do nothing to avenge the injury done to Tamar, Absalom, as her full brother, determined, himself, to become her avenger. For two years he had waited to see if David would stir in the matter. Amnon, as the eldest son, and as such the heir presumptive, had added insult to wrong, for he had treated Tamar with insolent harshness after criminal violence towards her.

At last an opportunity seemed to offer itself for vengeance. Like most of the royal personages of Israel Absalom drew a revenue from his flocks and herds, and was wont to celebrate the shearing of his sheep, each season, by a festival. He now invited all his brothers, Amnon amongst them, to such a rejoicing on his estate in Baal-hazor, on the marches of Ephraim and Benjamin. Tamar had lived in his house ever since her dishonour;

her maidenly robe of bright colours laid aside,—a desolate and broken-spirited shadow of her former self. Absalom had never spoken to Amnon since the shameful day, but had nursed the hatred he bore him, by the constant sight of his injured sister cowering under his protection.

In an evil hour for himself, the wrong-doer, taking the invitation as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation, accepted it. Absalom had wished to have David present also, that the vengeance which should have come from his hand should at least be carried out before him; but he excused himself. There had been, indeed, some difficulty in his getting permission to invite the brothers, and above all Amnon, for David appears to have dreaded some evil in so sudden an overture of friendship after such long-continued hatred. But dissimulation at last threw him off his guard, and the doomed one was allowed to go with the rest.

The murder was openly carried out. To give it a due legality as a just revenge there was no attempt at concealment: the whole of the princes were forced to witness it. Waiting till the wine was passing freely, Absalom himself gave the command to his servants to stab Amnon, and they did it forthwith. The confusion and alarm were great, for each might be charged with being privy to the act, and hence all, instantly, mounted their mules and fled. Absalom, also, forthwith hastened over the Jordan to Talmai, king of Geshur, and stayed there in exile for three years, to escape the otherwise inevitable punishment of his deed.

It is easy to fancy the excitement such an event would cause. David rose, and rent his garments, and lay on the earth; his servants standing round him with their garments also rent. Meanwhile, the king's sons, with

their numerous attendants, reached Jerusalem, for the bad news had travelled before them, and they, with the king and his servants, gave way to loud laments, and "wept sore."¹ But while they were thus for the moment paralysed, the avenger was in swift flight to safety.

The incident gives us a glimpse of one aspect of the character of Absalom, and is, perhaps, the key to all that followed. Though Amnon had been the son of a wife of the earliest lowly time of his father's life, he was the son of the first wife after David began to reign in Hebron. Now that the elder brother was, as he believed, rightly put to death, why should not Absalom be heir?

His tenderness to his sister, and even his fierce revenge for her wrong, show a nature kindly and loyal, though warped by the blood-laws of the age. His success in inducing David to let Amnon join the feast, speaks of craft and dissimulation: the murder itself shows a reckless daring that might have achieved what it chose if it had been supported by equal intellectual vigour. The succeeding events in his life will fall more naturally in connection with other names bound up with his future career.

¹ 2 Sam. xiii. 36.





JOAB.

AMONG those who rallied round David when a fugitive from Saul, with his head-quarters at the cave of Adullam, were the different branches of his father Jesse's house, who were, perhaps, in danger of proscription by the infuriated king, as the relations of one so hated and feared. Not only his brothers but his nephews appear to have cast in their lot with him at this critical time, though only one is mentioned till after his settlement in Hebron. His brothers seem never to have taken prominent places under him, but it was very different with his three nephews—Abishai, Joab, and Asahel.

The mother of these famous sons was Zeruiah the sister of David, but it is curious to note that their father is never mentioned. They were Bethlehem men like David himself, and showed the physical vigour and courage of their race, but were wanting in the loftier qualities which raised David above the rough soldiers and fierce chiefs of the day. Job alone exhibited traits of military capacity and talent for ruling, which raised him to the highest position in the state, under the throne.

The first mention of Joab's name throws a lurid light on the disorders and misery of David's reign at

Hebron. Abner, a full cousin of Saul, had set up Ishbosheth, Saul's son, as king of all the tribes, except Judah—which followed David. He had not, indeed, been able to do so for five years after Saul's death at Gilboa, so firmly was the land at large held by the Philistines, after their victory at that place; but when once proclaimed, the new ruler became necessarily a rival of David. Some time after, Abner, his foremost man, and a number of Ishbosheth's retainers, crossed the Jordan and came to Gibeon from Mahanaim, the temporary capital, perhaps on a religious visit to that shrine.

Their presence in Benjamin instantly roused the watchfulness of David, and caused him to send his nephew Joab with a band to observe their movements. On the east side of the hill on which Gibeon—"The hill town"—stood, one still sees the remains of a tank or pool about 120 feet by 100 in size, into which a copious stream flows from amidst the lines of olives and vines which rise on natural terraces over it. Here, at "the pool of Gibeon," the two parties met and watched each other from the opposite sides of the tank. As yet there had been no open hostility, and Abner, tired of the strained unnaturalness of such mutual jealousy, fancied blood might be saved and the claims of David and his own master settled, if, instead of a general battle, a few of the finest men on each side came forward as champions, on whose success or defeat the issue should be staked. It was a custom of those ages, and indeed of ages much later. Goliath had acted as bravo to the Philistine army, and in our own history Bohun played the same part at Bannockburn. Twelve men from each party accordingly stepped out; but the left-handed Benjamites and the right-handed men of Judah each

caught his adversary by the hair, and having thus their sword-hand free, ran their weapons into each other's side, so that all died together. Such a mishap at once roused the fierce passions of both parties, and "a very sore battle" followed, in which Abner was beaten and fled. Joab had shown his loyalty to David by a heavy blow at the power of his rival, but it drew one result after it which, in after years, was to darken his fair fame, and in the end bring on himself a violent death. His younger brother, Asahel,—like David, a fleet runner,—pursued Abner, and refused to turn back when once and again entreated, till the strong man, to save his life, had to take that of the stripling, and thus created a deadly blood-feud between himself and Joab. The fierce chase of the fugitives was only ended at sunset by an appeal of Abner to his opponent not to push the quarrel to extremities, but Job only deferred his revenge on Abner himself.

The civil war thus kindled continued apparently for years, during which success and strength passed more and more into the hands of David. Abner, however, loyally supported Ishbosheth till, in an evil hour for his master, he fell into unmerited disgrace, and went to Hebron to transfer his allegiance to the rising power he had hitherto so faithfully opposed.

Appreciating his personal character, and doubtless pleased with a defection which would so greatly weaken his rival, David received him with marked favour. He had, indeed, deserved a favourable reception; for he had already used his great influence to unite all Israel under David's sole rule. Joab was not at Hebron when the treaty of peace was made between his master and Abner; but heard of it on his return from a successful fray, soon after the new supporter of David had been

honourably dismissed. The old blood-feud instantly rose in his mind, and, perhaps, with it, the unworthy thought that he might find a rival in the illustrious subject just gained. Feeling his power as head of the fighting men of David, and jealous of any loss of favour, he resolved at once to prevent any fear of this, and to avenge his brother by an act of base treachery. Sending swift messengers after Abner, he induced him unsuspectingly to return to Hebron; and meeting him at the town gate, as if to do him honour, secretly stabbed him. Fierce, vindictive, and remorseless, he had at one blow secured his position, and quenched the long-standing feud.

The dangerous power of a leader so resolute and so strong in the attachment of the fighting men, was strikingly shown in David's helplessness to punish such a base violation of his safeguard. Bewailing the fallen hero, he was able to force Joab to follow the bier in sackcloth and rent garments, but he could do no more. "The sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him," and darkened his whole future life by their undue power, which he could not control as became his kingly position.

The cause of Ishbosheth was ruined by the defection and death of his general; and his own murder, which followed soon after, left David the undisputed king of the whole nation. With a wise and statesmanlike judgment the new ruler forthwith resolved to transfer his government from the secluded Hebron to a more central position, which he saw in the strong city of Jebus, the future Jerusalem till now held by the original inhabitants of the country. Relying on its strength, they dared attack; but David, stimulating his retainers by the promise that he who took it should be captain of his forces, and thus the first subject in the state, Joab

led a band on the desperate enterprise, surprised the famous citadel, and won the high reward.

In this post he served the king with splendid fidelity. The charge of the almost constant wars that followed was confided to him, and thus he was in reality the founder, in its widest sense, of the Jewish empire. His brother, Abishai, served in high office under him; but he himself was raised by many honours above all others. A chief armour-bearer followed him, and ten attendants carried his baggage and equipments. The signal for battle or retreat, hitherto given by the king or judge, was left to him, and he was "the prince" of the king's army, with the title of lord.¹ In the short intervals of peace he lived in Jerusalem, but he had an estate in the country.²

Brief hints of his principal campaigns are supplied in the sacred narrative. He commanded in two great wars against the Ammonites on the east of the Jordan. In the first, that nation was allied with the Syrians, but Joab and Abishai, attacking them before the union of their armies, inflicted crushing defeats, which David himself followed up in a battle with the Syrians and a number of allies, from the region of the Euphrates. In the second, Joab besieged Rabbah, the Ammonite capital; and having taken the lower town, showed his magnanimous loyalty by sending for David to come and lead the assault on the citadel, that he, rather than a subject, should have the crowning honour of the campaign.

It would have been better for both, however, if Joab's loyalty had confined itself to acts so worthy. It was, unfortunately, as unscrupulous as it was faithful, for it was at this siege that he carried out the infamous order

¹ 2 Sam. xi. 11.

² 2 Sam. xiv. 30.

of David, to get rid of Uriah the Hittite, whose wife the king had taken into his harem. The knowledge of such a dark secret of state may well have increased the fear in which his master held him.

A war with Edom, in which David won the decisive victory, while Joab was left to follow it up, intervened between the two wars with Ammon. He remained for six months in the country,¹ ruthlessly hunting down and killing every male he could find, till his name became, while he lived, an abiding terror with the remnant of the population.²

The crime of Uriah's murder had been the beginning of sorrows to the king. It was soon followed, in only too close imitation, by the outrage of his eldest son, Amnon, on Tamar, and that led, two years after, to the murder of the offender by Absalom. Then followed Absalom's flight, and his exile for three years, beyond the Jordan. Ever firm in his loyalty, Joab determined, at last, to reconcile father and son, and thus restore peace to the royal family, and succeeded in effecting the offender's recall to Jerusalem, though he had to use a stratagem to effect it. But David absolutely refused to see Absalom, and kept him from court for two years; Joab declining to act further in the matter. At last, however, he was won over at an interview obtained with him by the prince, to plead on his behalf with the king, and succeeded in procuring his full pardon. The beauty of Absalom and his winning manners, soon to prove so great a danger, had moved the heart even of the stern soldier.

In the great rebellion which soon after broke out, Joab stood by David with unflinching fidelity, not shrinking even from putting Absalom to death when

¹ 1 Kings xi. 15, 16.

² 1 Kings xi. 21.

he had the opportunity, to crush all danger for the future. He knew the weakness of the king for his children, but he was sincere enough in his attachment to him to brave all personal consequences. That he had much to fear was soon seen, for David not only refused to acknowledge a service so vital, but in his unreasoning anger displaced Joab from his post of commander-in-chief, installing in his place Amasa, another of his nephews, though he had been the general of Absalom.

Fierce resentment at such treatment was only natural, but the mode in which it showed itself left a blot on Joab's memory as dark and ineffaceable as the murder of Abner. Furious at being supplanted by a pardoned rebel, and no less so at all his services being forgotten in punishment for an act prompted only by supreme zeal for his master, he determined to revenge himself at once on David and Amasa. Hasting out to quench the last traces of the revolt, he met his cousin at Gibeon, bent on hunting down those whom he had now deserted. Pretending friendship, Joab saluted him, Judas-like, with the peaceful words, "Art thou in health, my brother?" and when the unsuspecting man let him come near to touch his beard and kiss him, took advantage of the moment to run him through, leaving him weltering in his blood at the side of the path. His murderer, with his sandals wet, and his person stained by the gush that had burst from the wound,¹ coolly went on in his pursuit of the rebels.

The death of the rough, fierce, faithful servant was touching. He had been true through all the vicissitudes of David's career, but, at last, from whatever cause, favoured Adonijah, notwithstanding David's

¹ 1 Kings ii. 5.

nomination of Solomon as his successor. In spite of all his services, David had groaned under the tyranny of a subject too powerful for him, and this treason filled the measure of his long pent-up indignation. Himself a soldier, capable of the harshest deeds, in spite of the gentler traits of his higher nature, he could not die till he had given orders to Solomon to carry out his vengeance on the grey-headed commander. Adonijah's renewed attempt to gain the throne at David's death sealed Joab's fate. Abiathar, the high priest, a friend and fellow-conspirator, having been deposed, the veteran felt that he was himself in danger. Fleeing to the sacred tent at Gibeon, and clinging to the altar, he claimed protection from the holiness of the spot. But Solomon would allow no escape, and the man of many battles, the pillar of the state through a long life, but also a double murderer, and now, at last, a traitor, was himself murdered in the very sanctuary itself.



ANCIENT IMPALEMENT OR "HANGING UP."



AHITHOPHEL.

THE only notice we have of Ahithophel occurs in connection with the catastrophe in which David all but lost his kingdom and Absalom lost his life. The rebellious son and his wily adviser are thus so linked together that they can be best studied when embraced in one sketch.

Absalom's revenge for his sister Tamar's dishonour was so natural an expression of the feelings of his age and race, and seemed dictated by a sentiment so honourable, however perverted in its realization, that our blame is tempered with sympathy, even for an act so terrible as his murder of Amnon. Yet, regarded more closely, there was much to weaken any such palliation. Had his indignation flamed forth at once against the offender, his violence would have appeared only the generous though cruel outburst of zeal for his sister's honour. But it marks a cold and heartless nature, in which calculation takes the part of passion, that he waited for two years, watching the opportunity to carry out his vengeance, and did so at last with every refinement of dissimulation and treachery, amidst the rejoicings of a family gathering. Was revenge for Tamar less his thought than destroying the heir-

apparent, and thus opening the way to the throne for himself, the second son?

Possibly Absalom had reckoned on the weakness of his father overlooking his crime as he had that of Amnon, and thus he fled to his grandfather at Geshur only when he saw his danger. Nor did he in his exile show any worthy regret and sense of having done wrong. The inevitable results of polygamy had filled him with the ambition to rise above the sons of his father's other wives, and get the throne, and for this alone he seems to have sought to return. To gain an outward reconciliation with David and a formal reception at court, was a necessary step in carrying out his design, and to procure this he bore himself with haughty insolence to Joab, to force from him an unwilling interview. No trace shows itself of the softness or sorrow that seeks comfort: he thought only of ambition and treachery. He had woven a plot with the deepest subtlety, and carried it out step by step, with fixed, unswerving purpose. Unless he was seen in the king's presence the people would not trust him. An audience granted, all he sought was gained. David's passionate love for his children revived in all its strength, and he pressed the traitor to his bosom! All Jerusalem heard of it, and suspected no base design. But Absalom was now only in name a son!

From this time the development of his plans proceeded openly. The first step was an apparently innocent imitation of his father's state. He was the heir-apparent, and it was only natural that he should have chariots and horses, and a long line of gaily-robed, running footmen, to precede him when he rode abroad.¹ His personal beauty was remarkable, and added to his

¹ 2 Sam xv. 1.

popularity He was the handsomest man of his day in the nation : his hair, especially, flowing in such rich luxuriance as made it proverbial, while his figure and features were perfect.¹ Round one who thus looked every inch a king, the sympathies and enthusiasm of the people seemed naturally drawn, and it was easy for his arts to “steal the hearts of the men of Israel.” The nation, no less than David, had yearned for his recall from banishment, and gloried in him when he was once more in Jerusalem.

Nothing could have been more skilful than the vain, ambitious, heartless young man’s bearing towards the crowd. Affecting easy and gracious condescension, he courted all alike. It was David’s custom, like other Eastern kings, to sit each morning in the shade of the city gate at Jerusalem, or in that of the gate of his palace, to judge all causes brought before him, but the number of cases would at times no doubt cause delay, even with the summary processes of Oriental justice, and every decision necessarily left one side aggrieved. Rising day by day with the daily light, Absalom made it his practice to go out among the crowds gathered to wait for his father’s appearance, and sedulously court their favour, contriving in doing so to depreciate David by crafty insinuations and contrasts. Mixing freely with all, he had a word for each in turn. “Of what city was he?” “What matter had he for trial?” Listening to the story, he would forthwith declare that the right was clearly on the speaker’s side ; but, “unfortunately, there was something wrong. The king could not do everything himself, and he had no deputy to see that causes were swiftly heard and righteously decided.” Then he would add—“Would that I were

¹ 2 Sam. xiv. 25, 26.

made judge in the land! Would that men could come to me to have their causes tried! I would soon let them have justice!"¹ It was literally—

Smooth dissimulation, taught to grace
A devil's purpose with an angel's face.

He would not even accept the customary reverence paid to the great, and much more to the heir-apparent. When any one, flattered and led away by his beauty and fine words, sought to kneel and do him reverence, he would not suffer it; but putting out his hand, checked and raised him up, at the same time embracing him as an equal, not an inferior, and kissing him as a friend.

Dexterous, creeping treason like this, left to work its way for four years after Absalom's return from Geshur,² had a wide effect in a town like Jerusalem, which every Israelite had to visit frequently for religious objects, apart from the ordinary requirements of business or pleasure. Nothing would spread faster, as each visitor returned to his own district, than the surpassing manly beauty of the prince, his enchanting condescension, his love of the people, and his desire to make all men happy. Any existing government creates complaint. We are never contented with what is, but itch for change, in the hope that it will remove some real or fancied grievance. Reports so favourable to the prince would necessarily throw his father into the shade. The heavy burden of the wars, the pressure of the taxes, the scandals always whispered against courts, and in David's case, in some respects, with only too much justice, tended

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 3, 4.

² 2 Sam. xv. 7 reads "forty years," but it is an evident error of the text. Josephus has "four."

alike to raise the son and depress the king. The leaven of disaffection had spread secretly through the nation before any one knew.

But though long in preparing, the plot required swift execution when ripe. Pretending that he had made a vow when in exile, that, if restored to his father's grace, he would retire to some quiet place and offer thanks to God by lengthened services, Absalom got leave to withdraw for a time from court, and betook himself to Hebron, the seat of the first happy years of his father's reign, and even yet the true centre of the kingdom, in the eyes of the men of Judah.

The request sounded so innocent and religious, that David's unsuspecting nature was thrown entirely off its guard. Two hundred invited guests of the chief families went with the prince from Jerusalem, in equal ignorance of any ulterior design; but their presence lent a false colour of loyalty to the journey, while it gave dignity to the traitor, and would no doubt be diligently circulated as a proof, that, even under the shadow of the throne, he had countless supporters. Meanwhile, secret emissaries were sent through all the land to prepare the people, and it was arranged that on a given day Absalom should be proclaimed everywhere, simultaneously, as king, to create a universal belief that he was peaceably chosen by the whole nation, as such, at Hebron.

Among those thus summoned, one was of special importance—Ahithophel, of the town of Gilo, which some place among the hills of Judah, others south of Hebron. He had been brought into contact with David, as the grandfather of Bathsheba, who was the daughter of Eliam, or Amiel, his son, one of the thirty-seven special heroes of David's forces,—Uriah, her husband, whom

David had betrayed and murdered to obtain her, being another.¹ His shrewdness and crafty wisdom had apparently recommended him to David's favour, so that he had become his special adviser, and had won his implicit confidence both as a man and a counsellor. Others went after Absalom in ignorance, but when Ahithophel sided with him openly, and publicly joined him, it seemed ominous. Such a man would not lightly commit himself: that must indeed be likely to succeed, for which he was willing to venture his all. But it was only another illustration of the want of wisdom even in the wise, and of the failure of the shrewdest calculation, by overlooking some all-important contingency.

The day at last came when the treachery so long preparing was thoroughly ripe. Men had previously had their appointed stations assigned them through the whole land, on every height; and at a given signal from Hebron, hill-top and tower, from one end of the country to the other, repeated the trumpet-flourish, which was the customary proclamation of a new king, and announced to all Israel that Absalom reigned at Hebron.

David was utterly disconcerted at the wide-spread insurrection, and lost his presence of mind so far as to betake himself instantly to flight across the Jordan, leaving Jerusalem open to the triumphal entry of his son. It seemed as if the kingdom had changed hands without a struggle.

The character of Absalom shows itself in a forbidding light, not only in the conception of such a revolt, but in all his subsequent steps. He had had craft and reticence enough to conceal his purposes, but he failed in capacity to carry them out successfully. Instead of taking the lead, he stood passive, to receive directions

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 34, 39.

from his advisers, and to this David owed his restoration and Absalom his ruin. No scruples held back the unhappy man from the greatest of crimes, the murder of his father. He was ready to adopt Ahithophel's counsel to pursue him at once, and put him to death before he gathered power to resist, and was only diverted from it by the fidelity of a friend of David, who, pretending loyalty to the revolution, prescribed a course which was certain to undo it. But he would, at least, openly show that his father had ceased to reign. To take possession of the harem of a king was the most marked expression of having supplanted him, and this, by Ahithophel's advice, Absalom now did.

Meanwhile the crafty plotter, who had hoped to be the chief counsellor of the new reign, was overwhelmed with chagrin at the success of the counsel of Hushai and the rejection of his own. It was clear that Absalom would soon be ruined, and with the return of David nothing could be expected but death by one who had played the part of an arch-traitor. Dishonoured and virtually disgraced almost before the new reign he had done so much to bring about was opened, he could not bear the mortification, and, withdrawing to his house at Gilo, put an end to his life. How keenly David had felt his treachery is shown in Psalm lv. 12-14 :—

“It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.”

Delay at such a crisis was inevitably fatal. While Absalom was collecting a huge army, David also was recovering himself, and gathered a strong army round him, under leaders like Joab, accustomed to victory.

Absalom at last, however, had made all preparations, and having crossed the Jordan, sought David in Gilead, to crush him in a decisive battle. But his force was no match for the disciplined valour of the fighting men under David, nor was there any such passionate loyalty for him as for his father, who was gently forced by his troops to keep out of danger, his single life, in their eyes, being worth more than the lives of ten thousand of themselves.

Utter defeat overtook the unhappy prince, and nothing was left for him but flight. The battle took place in the richly wooded valleys of Gilead, and Absalom, on his mule, had to make his way at the utmost speed of his beast through the forest. As he did so, however, a strange fate overtook him. His elaborately-plaited hair caught in the fork of an oak under which he was hastily passing, and suspending him in mid air, his mule ran on from under him. In this helpless plight he was found by Joab, who had none of the weakness of David, but determined, in direct disobedience to the orders he had received, to crush the rebellion at once by putting its head to death. Thrusting three javelins into the traitor's body, he left it hanging in the tree in its shame.

Thus ended a life that might, perhaps, have been very different but for the sin of David himself, which had weakened his moral power, and given Absalom the opportunity that often begets the offence.





SOLOMON.

SOLOMON, the third and last king of United Israel, was, after David his father, the greatest of the Jewish monarchs. His age seems almost fabulously distant from our time, for he reigned, according to the usual chronology, from B.C. 1015 to B.C. 975 :—centuries before Greece and Rome had begun to rank among the nations. Under him the national movement which had found its first expression in the choice of Saul as king by Samuel, reached its highest point, and from his death it sank again in steady decline. The dream of the Hebrew race that to have kings would bring blessings of all kinds, had proved a sad illusion, from which Solomon's reign tended finally to rouse them.

The monarchy which David had created by so many wars, and with so much toil and care, was not only upheld by Solomon, but strengthened and developed, with high ability and skill. In a long and peaceful reign he created memorials of lasting magnificence, in his temple and palaces ; opened new paths for national enterprise and activity ; brought to their highest glory the power, fortune, respect, progress, and prosperity of his people, and made himself a name which still survives in the mouths of all civilized races.

Yet his glory, in the impartial records of Scripture,

is of wholly a lower type than that of his father. The stain is left on him that, in things of religion, he was not true to the end to himself and his God, and he is not held free from the blame of having prepared the disruption of the monarchy which followed his death, by the course he pursued, and the means he took to attain it.

The son of Bathsheba, born after the war with the Ammonites,—the last great foreign war his father had to wage,—he received the name of Solomon—"The man of peace"—equivalent to our Frederick, or the German Friedrich, as a sign of David's yearning for that quiet which it was not his lot, as the founder of a kingdom, to attain. The influences about him in childhood and youth were very unfavourable to his healthy moral growth. He had no experience of the adversity and trial which had done so much to develop good in the character of his father; and David, moreover, had fallen from his high standing, before Solomon's birth, by his alliance with Bathsheba, and henceforth seems to have been largely passive in the hands of others, as if the loss of his former self-respect had paralysed his energy and self-reliance. A mother like Bathsheba, apparently the willing instrument of sensuality and crime, if we may judge from her eagerness to advance her son, and her unblushing assumption of influence and authority in the court, was very unfitted to train the future king. Nor is it likely that the heir-apparent found other friends more ready to take the ungracious task of forming his character, by the restraint and discipline so indispensable in early life, especially in such a position.

Endowed with surpassing abilities and thirsting for knowledge, Solomon was evidently trained with the

utmost care in all the "wisdom" of his day. Literature of which we now know nothing would be at his command, embracing records of the deeds of heroes, as in the Book of Jasher; collections of Proverbs, such as he himself afterwards made; poems like his father's odes and lyrics; and, it may be, books of natural science as then understood. He ascended the throne amidst the enthusiastic admiration of all; famous for his endowments, and no less so for his acquirements. Even to such as David and Nathan the prophet, he seemed qualified beyond all his brothers, by mental gifts and pious feeling, to be a true king of Israel. Indeed, as a result of a supposed attempt on the part of his half-brother Adonijah to forestall him on the throne, he was virtually king while his father still lived, and with his hearty approval. While Adonijah, at the Spring of Rogel, on the south of Jerusalem, was keeping the feast of his fancied accession, Solomon, at David's command, was anointed king at the Pool of Gihon, on the north side of the town, and joyfully accepted by the people at large.¹ We do not know his age when this happened. He was still young, but yet, apparently, somewhat over twenty.

He began his reign with a mingled firmness and clemency well fitted to strengthen his position. To Adonijah and his party he extended a free amnesty, unwilling to mark his accession by blood. Ere long, however, a renewed attempt—or what was regarded as one—on Adonijah's part, to secure the crown, led to harsher measures. He had sought the last nominal wife of David in marriage, a privilege open only to David's successor, and was at once put to death as a confirmed plotter, Joab, the grey-headed commander-in-chief in David's

¹ 1 Kings i. 9, 39.

wars sharing his fate ; while the High Priest, Abiathar, the other leading conspirator, in consideration of his priestly office, was only banished to his country house at Anathoth. Nor was Solomon to be blamed for this severity. To take the life of his brother seemed the only means of saving his own, and a movement thus crushed in the bud, was, in fact, the security against a civil war which would have desolated the land. The bad system of polygamy was the true source of the calamity.

From incidental notices it seemed probable that the various surrounding peoples whom David had subdued, did not submit to Solomon without at least one attempt to regain their independence. In any case they were speedily conquered, and the young king found himself acknowledged from Thapsacus on the Euphrates to Gaza in the Philistine plain, on the Mediterranean, and from Hamath in the valleys of Lebanon to the boundaries of Egypt and the head of the Red Sea. He was the first and also the last King of Israel who took his place among the great powers of the world—able to maintain wars or make treaties with them on the footing of an equal. The Phœnicians alone, in Palestine, retained their independence, and with them Solomon promoted still more the free commercial intercourse which his father had maintained ; while, in order to protect himself on his southern borders, he married a daughter of the King of Egypt,¹ and made a close alliance with that country.

¹ In 1 Chron. iv. 18, we read of one of the Pharaohs who allowed his daughter to marry a Jewish chief. The fact is, the power of Egypt was much broken by internal divisions. Shishak, the Pharaoh who attacked Rehoboam, was the descendant of a Syrian, and finally displaced the Egyptian Pharaoh, into whose family he had caused his son to marry. The capital was at

Satisfied with the extent of his kingdom, and at ease as to its security, Solomon, from the first, clearly saw that the highest aim of the ruler of a theocracy was to promote the religious, moral, and social welfare of his people. Hence, as much by disposition as by training, he sought rather the peaceful growth of his empire in these higher aspects than any fame as a conqueror. His reign, which lasted forty years, was thus a time of happy exemption from foreign or domestic strife, and every one could dwell in peace under his own vine and fig-tree, no one making him afraid. But it was also a time of earnest, peaceful activity in varied spheres, and, indeed, in every way remained unique in the history of Israel.

The expectations from the new reign cannot be better realized than by turning to the seventy-second Psalm, which bears the title of "A Psalm for Solomon," and is doubtless the magnificent invocation of blessing on his son, by his now aged father. It had, of course, a higher secondary bearing on One far greater—the true Messiah of a still distant future; but its aspirations and grand images of peace, prosperity, and glory were primarily the fond anticipations of a parent's heart, that what he would fain have seen in his own day might at least come in those of "The man of peace." Nor is it without a deep touch of pathos that the lofty hopes and fond belief close with the declaration that

Tanis, or Zoan, in the Delta, and the royal territory did not embrace more than a small part of the country. Foreign tastes had long shown the decay of the monarchy. Syrian dialects were widely in favour, old Egyptian words in many cases giving way to them. The state of things was very much like the condition of England, while French manners were the fashion, under Edward the Confessor. See Maspero, *Hist. Ancienne*, p. 337.

“the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are now ended.”

These bright expectations were destined to be more than fulfilled in some respects, but to be bitterly disappointed in others. With all his thirst for knowledge and his high judicial faculty, Solomon, like most men trained in unlimited self-indulgence, developed a mind essentially selfish and morally unsound. His people took only a subordinate place in his regard. As far as his circumstances allowed, he grew before long into a full-blown despot, whose gratification and glory was the one end of government. David had been weak enough to imitate the sensual splendour of the kings around him, by founding a harem—that fertile source of extravagant expense, and of still more fatal strife, in Eastern monarchies. But Solomon, with a sensuality perhaps unequalled before or since, fancied he could show his greatness in few ways better than by gathering a mob of queens and concubines, to the number of a thousand. Like many other Eastern kings, also, he indulged to the utmost a taste for architectual magnificence. Not only did he raise, at vast cost, a temple of surpassing splendour for that day; he added palaces for himself and his harem and courtiers, with utter disregard of expense, in Jerusalem, and different parts of the country, and, also, other structures for use or show. His every fancy must be gratified. Useful, or merely beautiful; necessary, or only for indulgence, all must be had that he desired. Conduits and pools; vineyards, and gardens with many exotic plants; parks and groves; castles and towers, besides his many palaces, must proclaim his greatness. Boundless wealth must be lavished on his court, his harem, his stables, and his state. Pomp and splendour unequalled in the history

of his nation, and rivalling that of the great monarchies of Egypt or Assyria, must carry his fame to all parts of the earth.

The morality of the nation could not be unaffected by such a régime, for the masses take their tone from the court. Luxury and extravagance were a poor substitute for the old simplicity of a pastoral and agricultural population; and, even where they could not be indulged, must have deepened the contrast between the past and the present. Nor could Solomon and the great ones of the land have such splendour, without suffering on the part of the masses. No sooner was he gone than the intolerable taxes he had levied on labour and substance became the subject of complaint, and it was for refusing reform in this that Rehoboam lost the ten tribes.

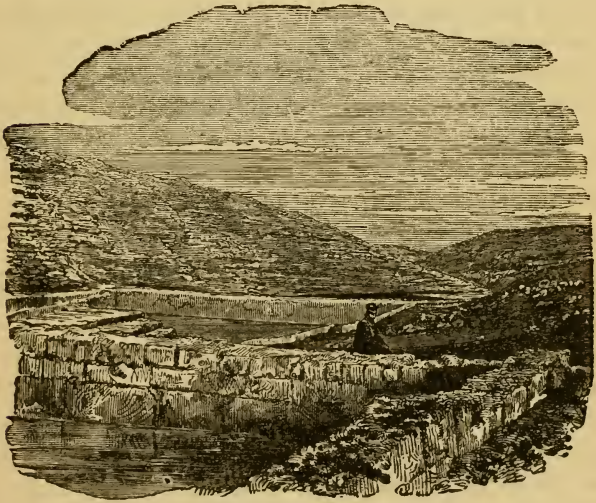
A gorgeous ritual service was introduced, and the Temple sacrifices attracted vast multitudes, but it is a question whether an outward and ceremonial religion, joined with the immorality of the prevailing life of the day, did not deaden the spiritual earnestness roused by Samuel, and maintained to some extent through the reign of David.

Nor was the monopoly of commerce in which Solomon indulged fitted to benefit the nation. Foreign luxuries, imported by a royal trader, might fill his coffers and bring money into circulation, but the gain would be largely his, while the moral deterioration would rest on the whole community. Add to all, the influence of an unlimited sensuality, so openly shown in the very highest circle by the maintenance of a harem on such a vast scale, and we may judge the effects of Solomon's reign on the highest interests of Israel. The close of his life, indeed, seems an illustration of the results of his reign. That he, the wise, the learned, the magnificent, the

builder of the Temple, the great patron of the priests of Jehovah, should fall away to worship the idols of the heathen,¹ reveals a hollow unreality and insincerity in public opinion, of which it was, no doubt, largely an expression.

Wise, Solomon doubtless was ; but to me he seems to have been so only in a very limited sense, for that is surely far from true wisdom which aggrandises the throne at the cost of the nation, and, after creating an ephemeral and artificial glory, leaves to the next heir only the wreck of a miserable and exploded failure.

¹ 1 Kings xi. 4.



SOLOMON'S POOLS.



THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

THE visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon is not only noticed in the Scriptures, but has been the occasion of endless legends alike in Rabbinical and Mahommedan literature. Her country seems to have been a province of Southern Arabia; apparently the same as that known to the Romans as the land of the Sabæans. The national name was derived from a grandson of Abraham and Keturah,¹ and thus the bond of common descent linked the race with the Hebrews. That the queen of a people connected, at least remotely, with Israel, should have been interested in one so exceptionally famous as Solomon, is thus readily explained.

Sheba was famous among the ancients as one of the richest of countries, though how far exaggeration aided this estimate is hard to tell. Its exports were incense, balsam, myrrh, spices, precious stones, and gold;² but there does not seem to be at this day any region of extraordinary fertility or wealth in Arabia Felix, so far as travellers have discovered. Legend has embellished the whole land with the most extravagant praises. Saba was the largest and finest city, it asserts, ever built by man; and it was so strongly fortified that it might have defied all the armies of the world at once.

¹ Gen. xxv. 3.

² Ezek. xxvii. 22.

Its palaces of marble were countless, and they stood in the midst of magnificent gardens. A vast system of dykes and canals for irrigation secured the fertility of the whole country, even in times of drought. It was, moreover, covered with the finest trees in every direction, so that travellers knew nothing of the scorching rays of the sun. Its air was alleged to be so pure and refreshing, and its sky so transparent, that the inhabitants lived to a very great age, in the enjoyment of perfect health.

The exaggeration so natural to the East had, doubtless, carried as many reports respecting Solomon to Sheba, through rumour, from land to land, as had spread to Judæa and elsewhere respecting Sheba itself. Josephus, in the generation after Christ, with all his Greek culture, had ideas of the "glory of Solomon" which seem wild enough:—"He was no way inferior to the Egyptians, who are said to have been beyond all men in understanding. He also excelled and distinguished himself in wisdom above the most eminent Hebrews of his day. He composed books of odes and songs, a thousand and five; of parables and proverbs three thousand—for he spoke a parable on every sort of tree, from the hyssop to the cedar; and, in like manner also, about beasts; about all sorts of living creatures, whether on the earth, or in the seas, or in the air. For he knew them all, and described them. God also enabled him to learn that skill which expels demons. He composed spells by which diseases are removed, and he left behind him exorcisms by which devils may not only be driven out, but can never return."¹ The Rabbis, indeed, went further, as may be judged from one sample of the stories in the Talmud:—"After David, rose up his son Solomon,

¹ *Antiq.*, vii. 2.

and the Ever Blessed gave him dominion over the wild beasts, and over the birds of heaven, and over the creeping beasts of the earth, and over all devils or spirits of darkness, and he understood the languages of them all, and they understood him. . . . When now the heart of King Solomon was once light with wine, he sent forth and invited all the kings of the east and west, who lived near the land of Israel, to come and visit him in his royal palace. And when he was another time cheered with wine, he commanded that the lutes, cymbals, and drums, and harps on which his father David played, should be brought in. A third time he ordered that all the wild beasts, and the birds of heaven, and the creeping things of the earth, and also the devils, and the spirits of darkness, should be gathered, that they might dance before him, and that they might see all his glory, and all the kings who were around him. And the Scribes called them by their names, and they all came and gathered themselves to him." But this is enough of such monstrous inventions.

The commerce so widely extended by Solomon carried his name to distant countries, and, amongst others, to Sheba, where it reached the ears of the reigning queen. Of the age or condition of this royal lady, whether married or unmarried, nothing is told. In any case, the reports she heard of the Jewish monarch captivated her imagination, and she resolved on a journey to Jerusalem to see him. Setting out by land, with a great retinue and a long train of camels laden with spices, and gold, and precious stones, as presents to Solomon, after the manner of Eastern princes, her coming naturally excited the greatest interest. She had heard much of his surpassing wisdom, and proposed to put it to the test, in Oriental fashion, by asking him the

hardest riddles and questions invented for her for the occasion.

What these were is not told in Scripture, but legend has given its own version of some of them. Balkis—for that is said to have been the queen's name—was beautiful as an angel of Paradise, and very young, and when she had determined to try Solomon, did so by sending, before her own setting out, an embassy of five hundred youths dressed like maidens, and as many maidens dressed like young men, commanding the former to behave in the presence of Solomon like girls and the latter like youths. She sent also, as a gift, a thousand carpets wrought with gold and silver, a crown of the finest pearls and hyacinths, and many loads of musk, amber, aloes, and other products of her country. To these she added a closed casquet containing an unperforated pearl, a diamond intricately pierced, and a goblet of crystal. He was to distinguish the youths from the maidens, to tell the contents of the closed casquet, to perforate the pearl, to thread the diamond, and to fill the goblet with water that had neither fallen from the clouds nor flowed from the earth.

Solomon discovered the contents of the casquet by the help of spirits; found out the sex of the male and female slaves by the different way in which the two sexes used the water given them to wash themselves; pierced the pearl by the help of a magic stone given him by an evil spirit and an inspired raven; and threaded the diamond, which had openings through it in all directions, by the help of a worm, brought him by a demon. It crept through each hole in the jewel, and left a silk thread behind it. Solomon gave it the mulberry tree as its special food, at its request, and thus the silkworm has lived in the mulberry leaf ever

since ! The goblet he filled with water from neither the clouds nor the earth, by making a slave run till his perspiration was so copious as to brim it over.

The sober account of Scripture limits details to a statement of her admiration of the state and pomp of the Jewish king, of which we are able from other notices to fill up some parts of the outline.

The Temple had doubtless been built when the visit was made ; but its size, however imposing in the eyes of antiquity, would have disappointed modern ideas. Like the Grecian sanctuaries, which were intended simply for the priests, the people worshipping outside in the open air, that of Solomon was very small. It seems to have been only 90 feet long, 30 broad, and 45 high ; that is, smaller than many moderate-sized parish churches in England. The great Royal Palace appears to have been much larger, for it took thirteen years to build, whereas the Temple took only seven. The number of the cedar pillars in it procured it the name of the House of the Forest. Indeed, both it and the Temple abounded in rare and costly wood, and the details in both displayed a lavish outlay.

But it was the pomp and state of the court which especially roused the wonder of the visitor. The Temple, the palaces, and the covered way from one of the latter to the sanctuary, were grand in her eyes, but she was even more struck by the rich profusion of the royal tables, the vast numbers who sat down at them, the splendour of the officials who waited on Solomon, the imposing appearance of the cupbearers, and the vast wealth which such majesty implied. The throne itself must have struck her, for it was of ivory overlaid with pure gold, and two hundred targets of beaten gold hung on the walls of the banqueting chamber. Gold, indeed,

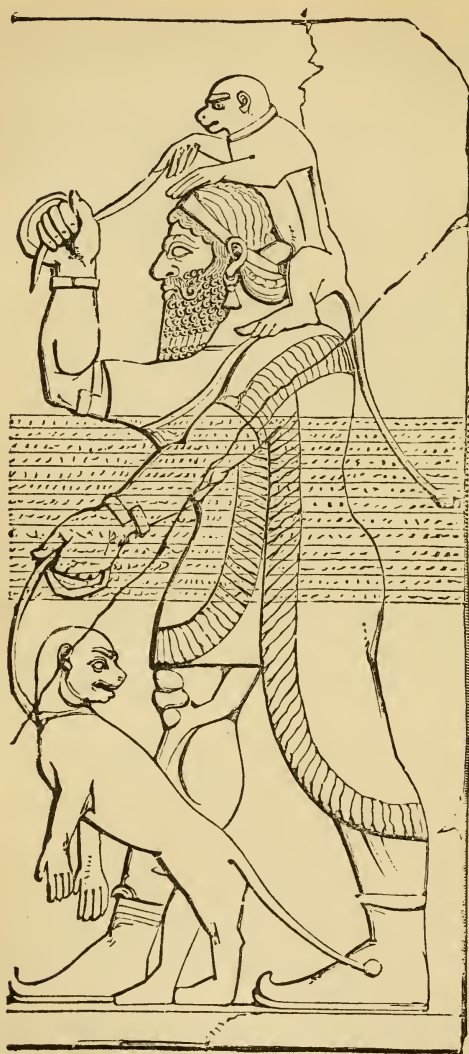
shone on every side, for all the drinking vessels of the king were golden, and so were all the vessels of the House of the Forest.

No doubt, also, the royal stables were a wonder to the Arabian queen. There were cities especially set apart as the head-quarters of the cavalry, for Solomon had sixteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horse-soldiers. Jerusalem, as the capital, would of course have its full share.

The commerce which enabled Solomon to indulge his tastes thus imperially was itself one of the wonders of the age. As a monopolist, he could do as he pleased. Hired vessels sailed from the head of the Red Sea to Ophir, which has been variously sought for in Arabia, India, Ceylon, Africa, and even Peru. Other vessels traded between Joppa and Tarshish, which appears to have been at the mouth of the Guadalquivir, in Spain, and brought back gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks, some of which, doubtless, were the fruits of a further commerce between Tarshish and Africa. It is curious to note that the voyage along the Mediterranean and back, in these early ages, took no less than three years.

The Arabian queen might well have wondered at such splendour and commercial activity. How far her intimacy with Solomon went is not hinted in Scripture, but tradition has ventured to report that she bore a son of whom the king was the father, and the Abyssinians even boast that their royal line is descended from him. We are only told in the Bible that she and Solomon exchanged gifts with lavish freedom, and that she then returned to her own country.

This visit must have taken place before the fatal lapse of the wise man into idolatry, in his last years.



APES, FROM AN ASSYRIAN TABLET.

Nor would the visitor, perhaps, hear of the tyranny which lay beneath so glittering a surface; if, indeed, she would have thought much of it, even had it been told her. But it detracts not a little from the glory of the Temple, in modern eyes, to know that its materials had been prepared by seventy thousand slaves, told off to bear loads, and eighty thousand employed in felling and squaring the necessary timber in the mountains, and

that the whole nation groaned under the forced labour and taxes of which the magnificence so admired by the Arabian visitor was in part the result.

Nor would she understand the corruption which was being brought into the land by the extent and character of the royal harem. To marry foreign wives, or to have a huge seraglio, was a violation of the Mosaic law, and no one can tell how far the national decline, which dates from Solomon's reign, was caused by the introduction of foreign heathenism and morals, through the great king's example.

To us the reign of Solomon appears a striking illustration of the failings of the ablest men, when true religious principle does not counteract selfishness. Solomon, with such abilities, might have built up the nation in the noblest sense, in true prosperity and religious purity. He chose, rather, to set his heart on creating a false and dazzling glory for himself, and treated the nation as made for him, rather than **the** object of his care.



REHOBAM.

THE almost inevitable results of the harsh and immoral reign of Solomon—with its selfish aggrandisement of the throne and its oppression of the people; its instability of principle, which supported idolatry after building the Temple of Jehovah; and its sensuality, which gathered a harem of unprecedented extent—showed themselves in the character and fate of his son and successor, Rehoboam. It is impossible to withhold pity from one warped and corrupted by such evil influences in his education and earlier life.

Rehoboam was the son of an idolatress, Naamah—"The loved one,"—a daughter of Hanun, the king of the Ammonites,¹ who had been conquered by David, but had the good fortune to see his grandson, by this marriage, on the throne of the kingdom that had destroyed his own. Rehoboam's bearing towards religion was exactly what might have been expected from such a parentage. Like his father, he maintained the worship of Jehovah, with the Temple at Jerusalem as its head-quarters and centre; but like the son of an idolatrous mother, he built high places for sacrifice on the hills, and raised idol statues of Baal, and the huge

¹ Septuagint.

wooden pillars known as Asherahs, consecrated, apparently, to the moon. Nor was the worship a mere outward difference from that of Jehovah. All the abominations associated with Syrian idolatry were freely sanctioned—abominations so foul, that in later centuries they were blamed for the deeper corruption of even the foul immorality of Rome. The puritan zeal and earnestness of the great reformation under Samuel had at last died out under Solomon and his weak unworthy son. It was an anticipation of the license of our own Restoration times, after the strictness of the days of Cromwell.

The boundless expenses of the court during the preceding reign had already excited an abortive insurrection in Solomon's lifetime, under the leadership of Jeroboam, the chief collector of the taxes and imposts in kind, from the central and northern tribes. Energetic, ambitious, unscrupulous, and perhaps, also, patriotic, he had used his possession of the public moneys to build a strong citadel in the centre of the land. It seems, indeed, as if he had outwitted Solomon, and induced him to sanction this under the pretext that force was needed to overawe the disaffected population. The ruins of a fortress, with walls nine feet thick, are still found on Mount Gerizim, and seem to be those of Jeroboam's stronghold. Here he summoned Israel round him to demand a reduction of fiscal and other burdens from Solomon, threatening revolution if it were not granted.¹ But the vigorous action of the king for the time suppressed the threatened danger, and Jeroboam had to flee for his life to Egypt. There, however, in spite of Solomon's marriage alliance with that country, he found a friendly welcome at the court

¹ Septuagint.

of Shishak, or Sheshonk, the Egyptian king, who was, apparently, glad to use him as a possible means of weakening the Jewish kingdom, which threatened to grow too powerful. Not only was he entertained with all munificence as long as Solomon lived, but the elder daughter of the favourite sultana—a woman of great influence in Egypt—was given him as his wife.

The impulse that led Jeroboam to his determined disaffection throws a strange light on the peculiar constitution of Hebrew society. He had, on one occasion, been at Jerusalem, perhaps with the taxes of the Ten Tribes, of which he was chief collector, and was returning, when a prophet—Ahijah, of Shiloh—met him. Jeroboam, as became him on a visit to court, wore a new outer robe, but this Ahijah caught, and at once rent into twelve pieces. The two were alone on the road, and the prophet, thus safe, proceeded to explain his strange conduct. Keeping two pieces for himself, he gave ten to Jeroboam, and told him that God commissioned him to say, that He would rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and take from him ten tribes, over which he, Jeroboam, should rule. For the sake of David and of Jerusalem, two tribes were to be left to the line of Solomon; and, besides, the catastrophe would not happen in his day, but in that of his son. The idolatry which the wise king had introduced had brought down on him this judgment, for Jerusalem and the fields and cities of the land were filled with the altars and statues of Ashtoreth, the goddess of the heathen Canaanites of Sidon; Chemosh, the god of the subject Moabites, and Milcom, that of the conquered Ammonites. Roused by such a Divine admonition, Jeroboam inevitably became a conspirator. The land belonged to Jehovah, and He could justly

give the crown to whom He chose; Solomon had broken the conditions on which alone he held it, and to dethrone him, or at least his son, was to unseat one already denounced by the true invisible King in heaven. It is no wonder we read that Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam.¹

His royal marriage had been only a political stroke, and had in no degree secured friendly relations between Jerusalem and Egypt. Hadad, the king of Edom, had fled thither in David's time, and had been entertained at court. In Solomon's day he was allowed to return to his own country, which he seems to have reconquered from Israel. In the same way Jeroboam found a welcome in the Egyptian palace, and was protected there while Solomon lived, much as the Stuarts and their partizans found a home in France under Louis XIV.

With Solomon's death, Jeroboam's hopes revived. The fulfilment of the destiny foretold by the prophet had apparently approached. The conspirator, therefore, instantly set out for his own country, and having gathered sufficient force, laid siege to the fortress he had built on Gerizim. Having won it, and thus secured a footing in the country, he assembled the Ten Tribes, to impose conditions on Rehoboam before his formal acceptance as king. A great national assembly was held in the midst of the land, at Shechem,—now Nablus,—and thither Rehoboam went to meet his subjects, and, as he thought, to receive their allegiance. Emboldened by popular support, Jeroboam came forward as the spokesman of the multitude, and at once showed the king, had he possessed judgment to perceive it, that nothing short of thorough reform in the general

¹ 1 Kings xi. 23-40.

taxation, and in the imposts for the royal expenditure, could save his kingdom.

The tone of Jeroboam was that of the mouthpiece of a nation proud of its freedom, and determined, if needs were, to maintain it. They were ready, they said, to accept Rehoboam and serve him, but it would only be on condition that he lightened the burdens under which they had groaned during the reign of his father. The jealousy of Ephraim at Judah having rule, doubtless added to the bitter sternness of the demand, which, however, was so clearly just, that a man of sense would have granted it at once.

But Rehoboam was in no humour to retrench his state and indulgence, and could only answer, that he would take three days to consider the matter, and then report to them. Meanwhile, he sought the advice of the old counsellors of his father, men of experience and capacity, and they urged ready compliance; telling him shrewdly, that concession at the moment would secure permanent allegiance.

The headstrong king would not, however, humble himself, and turned with ill-concealed disgust to the flock of parasites of his own age, who hoped to use him for their personal good, by servile flattery. They scouted submission, and trusted to win his permanent favour, by urging him to give a rough answer, and fiercely compel obedience to his will. It was enough. Israel as a whole had yielded to David only after a resistance of years. During Solomon's days it had well nigh thrown off the yoke, and it determined to do so now. The words of Rehoboam were, indeed, enough to provoke a tamer people to anger. Addressing the vast crowd, through Jeroboam, the king told them that his father had made their yoke heavy, but

he would make it heavier still : his father had scourged them with whips, but he would use a lash with iron points that would sting them like scorpions.

The result was no longer doubtful. Instantly the cry rose, What had the mighty Ephraim to do with the feeble South? Why should it submit to the house of David, the son of Jesse, a man of Judah? Israel had always been its own master, and would be so once more. "To your tents, O Israel! Take care of your own house, O David!" The old tribal jealousies, intensified by a sense of wrong, had in an hour shattered to pieces the kingdom built up with so much labour by David and Solomon. Jeroboam had served Egypt only too well. Henceforth there was no fear of rivalry from the now ruined throne of Jerusalem. Jewish history was hereafter to be that of a steadily declining monarchy.

The petty kingdom left to Rehoboam included the barren hills of Judah and Benjamin, the remnant of the tribe of Simeon on the south, and the Israelitish settlers in these limits. He had thrown away the fertile hills and valleys of Samaria and Galilee, and the rich lands across the Jordan. The glory of the throne was gone! If the line of David did not henceforward seek honour as the centre of the theocracy, and the special instrument for the maintenance of the worship of Jehovah, it could hope for no other. Its worldly grandeur had for ever departed.

The shock to Rehoboam must have been terrible; but he could not realize the extent of his calamity till, on sending his chief officer of the taxes to collect the accustomed tribute, the unhappy official was cruelly murdered. For a moment, thoughts of force to compel submission rose in the king's mind, and a huge levy of

the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin was ordered to effect this. But, once more, a prophet appeared on the scene, forbidding civil war, in the name of Jehovah, and Rehoboam's fears or wiser thoughts forthwith yielded to peaceful counsels.

Confining himself to prudent measures of defence, he at once indulged his hereditary taste for building, and strengthened the small territory left him, by raising forts over the land, and making walls round the principal towns. The hill of Bethlehem, as an outer defence of Jerusalem on the south, was fortified: so was Etam on the top of the next ridge south, and Tekoa on its hill, a few miles still farther south. Each stood guard over the wadys running steeply down to the Dead Sea. Beth-zur, a little north of Hebron; Shoco, a few miles south of it; Adullam, in the bare gorges of Judah; Gath, on the edge of the Philistine plain—one of the relics of David's victories; Mareshah, half way between it and Hebron; that hill-town itself; Ziph, a mile or two south of it; Adoraim, on the ridge to the west; Lachish, a few miles more to the west; Azekah, half way between Shoco and Hebron, had their defences raised or strengthened; but, after all, they were visible from one another in their little sweep of landscape, though they marked the southern limits of the kingdom. On the north there was hardly any territory. Aijalon and Zorah, almost on a line with the capital, were the only posts worth naming. The whole monarchy was not larger than a middle-sized English county.

Things went on well for a time. Whether from prudence, or a passing fit of piety, the worship of Jehovah was duly maintained, with the effect of attracting many pious Israelites from all the tribes to settle in Judah. After a while, however, Rehoboam relapsed

into the worst sins of his father. Heathenism was patronized, with all its unutterable impurities, and the land, corrupt and effeminate, lay open to its enemies. To use the words of a prophet—they had forsaken God, and God forsook them.

Stirred up, most probably by Jeroboam, Shishak, or Sheshonk, king of Egypt, marched against Judah. The various towns, and Jerusalem itself, easily fell a prey to him, and he was bought off only by giving all the treasures of the Temple and of the palace. Strange to say, there is a memento of the invasion still to be seen on the walls of a temple at Karnak, where Shishak has recorded the names of many of Rehoboam's towns, Jerusalem amongst others, as taken by him. So very soon did all Solomon's glory pass away; so very soon, still more, was the Temple reduced to a dishonoured shadow of its brief splendour. Does it not seem as if the pompous ritual worship, set up by Solomon, had thus early received the reprobation of God as only outward, and largely indifferent? Ritualism could have had but a subordinate place in the essence of religion, even under the theocracy, when the Temple was thus humbled almost as soon as it had been built, and the prophet, with his utter absence of all external show and ceremony, was advanced by God Himself to the honour from which the priest was cast down.

Rehoboam reigned only seventeen years, but they were troubled to the end. Not only Egypt, but Israel kept him disquieted, year after year. He was able, however, to leave his now petty kingdom to his son; but, from his day, Judah was of no account among the nations.



JEHOSHAPHAT.

THE weak and unfortunate Rehoboam had been succeeded by his son Abijah, the child of Absalom's daughter, Maachah, who further weakened Judah by commencing a fierce attack on the much stronger northern kingdom of Israel. Gleams of success appeared to reward him, for he took Bethel, the religious capital of Jeroboam, and one or two smaller places in Ephraim. But as he did not destroy the great Israelitish temple set up to rival that of Jerusalem, and as Bethel was won back again very soon by Israel, the only lasting result of the bitter strife between the two kingdoms was to weaken both. After a brief reign of three years, Abijah died, and was succeeded by his son or brother Asa, shortly before the death of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel.

At Asa's accession things looked prosperous for the great kingdom of the Ten Tribes, but they were not so in reality. Nadab the son of Jeroboam, with all the males of his father's house, was murdered, after a reign of two years, by Baasha, one of his generals, and the conspirator seated himself on the throne as the creature of the soldiery. The army, not the people, had thus early become the chief power in Israel. Asa's reign was vigorous and able. An invasion by the

Ethiopian dynasty of Egypt, stirred up by Baasha, was repelled with signal bravery, and a subsequent attack by the northern king resulted only in the capture of Ramah, on the main road, six miles north of Jerusalem. Subsidizing the king of Damascus, Asa forced his enemy to give up Ramah, the possession of which cut off Jerusalem from communications with the north, but it was a service dearly bought. Henceforward the Syrians were the terror of both Israel and Judah. Razing the fortifications of Ramah to the ground, Asa forthwith built two forts on the two sides of the road, a little nearer Jerusalem; and having hewn out great reservoirs for water, in case of a siege, made a future blockade of his capital impossible.

But, notwithstanding his warlike triumphs, Asa was naturally inclined to peace, and more at home as a zealous religious reformer than a conqueror. His great aim was to restore the worship of Jehovah, and raise his nation by the many-sided influences of a pure faith and practice. His death, in B.C. 917, left his noble schemes unfinished, but the sceptre passed into the hands of one who had no higher ambition than to follow in the footsteps of his father.

Jehoshaphat—"Jehovah is the judge,"—was thirty-five years of age at his accession, and reigned twenty-five years. His name was itself an illustration of his father's loyalty to the ancient faith. When he ascended the throne, Omri, the founder of Samaria, was still alive, but he died two years later, so that Ahab and the new king of Judah began their reigns almost together. As brave as his father, and more enterprising; equally faithful to Jehovah, but with broader views of his duty as a theocratic king; ready for war, if unavoidable, but naturally inclined to peace; he was, besides,

endowed with a genius for organization, and a high intelligence which made his reign a notable era in the history of his people.

Uncertain relations with the northern kingdom forced Jehoshaphat at the outset to take steps to protect his territory against danger from that quarter. Garrisons were placed in all the principal towns of Judah, and in those of Ephraim taken from Baasha, and plentiful stores of war were accumulated for their use. Jerusalem had a special force, including cavalry.¹ To prepare the kingdom for a vigorous defence in case of need, he further remodelled the entire military arrangements, enrolling apparently the whole population for active service in case of emergency.² But defence, not defiance, was his maxim; he was prepared for war, but he sought only peace. Reversing the policy of the former kings of Judah, he saw greater benefit in alliance with the northern kingdom than in civil war. An overture of friendly relations having therefore been made by Ahab, he at once entertained it, entering into a treaty of mutual defence, which he faithfully kept, even after Ahab's death, with his successors. But this love of peace was, in one particular, allowed to carry him too far, for he married Joram, his heir, to Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel; a union which bore the disastrous fruits only too likely to follow the installation in Jerusalem of a queen from a stock so evil.

The first result of this alliance with Ahab was a campaign against the Syrians who, under their head, the king of Damascus, held the Israelitish city of Ramoth, in Gilead. For the first time since the secession of the Ten Tribes, Samaria had been honoured by a visit from the

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 24; 2 Kings iii. 7.

² 2 Chron. xvii. 1, 2, 13-18.

king of Judah, and he had been received with great public rejoicings and high honour. Under such circumstances, the proposal of Ahab that Judah should help him in his impending campaign against the king of Damascus was hard to refuse, but Jehoshaphat showed his reverent nature by declining to assent till he had consulted the prophets, and obtained from them Divine sanction to his proposed action. One only, indeed, out of the four hundred, proved superior to the temptation of flattering the northern king, but he did not forbid the war, though predicting the death of Ahab during its course.

The forces of Judah were therefore called out, and having united with those of Ahab, crossed the Jordan and advanced to Ramoth-Gilead—"the heights of Gilead,"—a great fast-



EGYPTIAN STANDARDS.—Wilkinson.

ness which commanded the northern parts of the transjordanic territories. It had been taken by Benhadad I. during the reign of Omri, and its loss was deeply felt by Israel. After the repeated defeats of the Syrians by Ahab, in their attempts against Samaria, its restoration had been promised, by solemn treaty, but in spite of this it had never been surrendered. Ahab's efforts to regain it proved, however, unsuccessful. A chance arrow, moreover, wounded him mortally, so that he died in a few hours before the struggle in front of the city had been

decided. Jehoshaphat himself narrowly escaped, the Syrians having closed round him, thinking his plume was that of the king of Samaria, but Benhadad, having no wish to bring on a final rupture with Judah, let its king escape when the mistake was discovered.

The reign of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, was too short to allow of any further entanglement of Jehoshaphat in Israelitish interests during its course. But the death of Ahab on the field of battle had left matters beyond the Jordan in such confusion, that the chivalrous king of Judah could not refuse his aid to Ahaziah's brother, Joram, the next king of Samaria. The whole country of Gilead had been left open to the Syrians, and the king of Moab refused to pay any longer a heavy tribute to Samaria, which had been duly sent each year while Ahab was alive.

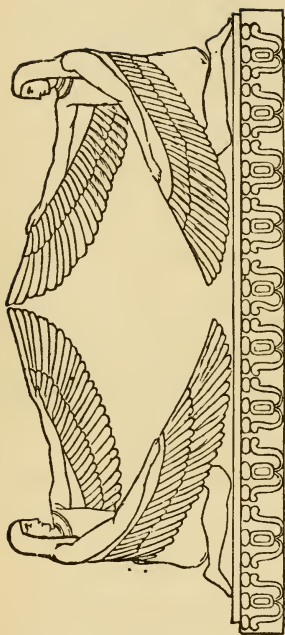
Ahaziah had entered with great spirit on the war which his father had begun, and had assailed both Syria and Moab, when his untimely death closed his career. But in the meantime, Mesha, the king of Moab, excited by the fact that the first year's campaign against him had been unsuccessful, determined to invade Judah, and thus carry the war into the enemy's country. A strong force of Moabites, with a contingent of Ammonites and Maonites—an Edomite tribe—was therefore launched against Jehoshaphat. Marching across the plain of Jericho to Engedi, on the north-west side of the Dead Sea, they reached the tableland of the wilderness of Judah by the difficult ascent of Ziz—a mere track that scales the front of the high precipice bordering the lake. Before them there now lay a succession of stony deserts, known as Jeruel and Tekoa, not far from Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The danger to Judah was imminent. A public fast and humiliation were at

once proclaimed to implore help from above. But Jehoshaphat was not an unreasoning fanatic. A huge force was instantly mobilized to repel the invader. It proved, however, unnecessary. The Maonites, for some reason, quarrelled with their allies of Moab and Ammon, and the dispute rose to furious battle. Weakened by this, and perhaps alarmed by Jehoshaphat's approach in such circumstances, the survivors fled homewards in a sudden panic, leaving their camp as it stood, with so prodigious a booty for the spoilers, that three days were spent by the Jewish army in collecting it, when it came to the spot. Such a deliverance, so evidently from God, touched the heart of the king and his people alike. He and his force had marched out with a choir of Levites at their head, chanting psalms, to rouse them to enthusiasm for their country and their religion, both imperilled; they now returned with similar jubilation, to celebrate with the flourish of sacred trumpets, the murmur of harps, the clang of cymbals, and the loud Hallelujahs of multitudinous voices,* a grand *Te Deum* before Him who sat between the cherubim in the temple.

Under Joram of Samaria, the successor of Ahaziah, Jehoshaphat once more joined in an invasion of Moab; but in spite of victory on the advance, and the reduction of the open country, Mesha's stubborn defence of his capital, and his despairing self-sacrifice in offering up his eldest son on the city wall to propitiate Chemosh, the national god, brought the campaign to an impotent conclusion. The allied Jewish forces retreated, and Mesha was left unconquered.¹

So much vigour on the part of Jehoshaphat had its effect on the nations round. The Philistines and some

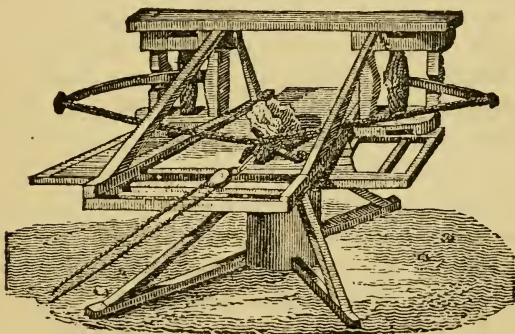
¹ For a full account of Mesha, who is the king mentioned on the Moabite Stone, see *Hours with the Bible*, vol. iv. pp. 106, ff.



THE ARK OF THE COVENANT AND THE MERCY SEAT.

Arab tribes did homage to him, and sent him presents,¹ and Edom became tributary.² Yet the territory of Judah was very limited; its south border post being Beersheba, its northern bound the hills of Ephraim, and its eastern the Dead Sea.

It was, however, in civil and religious affairs much more than in military, that Jehoshaphat's reign was most distinguished. He was pre-eminently a great organizer, and left his mark as such on the history of his people. A teeming population filled the whole land,³



CATAPULT FOR STONES.

and lived in security, protected by the wise military defences and preparations of the king. Prosperity reigned. Caravanserais were built by the king on the principal lines of commercial travel,⁴ and the foreign sea-trade of Solomon was sought to be restored by a line of Tarshish-ships, which were to start from Ezion Geber, on the Gulf of Akaba. Ahaziah of Israel, was to send crews for them from Phenicia; but a great storm,

¹ 2 Chron. xvii. 11.

² See proofs in Art. "Josaphat," in Richm's *Handwörterbuch*.

³ 2 Chron. xvii. 14-18.

⁴ 2 Chron. xvii. 12.

unfortunately, destroyed the whole fleet as it lay in the roadstead of the port, before it had set out on its first voyage, and the catastrophe seemed so ominous that the project was forthwith abandoned.

Material prosperity, however, was not the only bright feature of the times. Jerusalem was a city "full of justice, righteousness lodged in it."¹ High religious feeling expressed itself in devotional psalms, of which some still remain in the sacred collections.² Foremost in the religious enthusiasm was the king himself. In the northern kingdom fierce opposition raged between Ahab and the prophets; but in Judah they stood in the same close relations to the throne as they had enjoyed under David. We read of the seers Jehu, Eliezer, and Jehaziel, who, although very different from the mere flatterers of power in the capital of Ahab, were yet as confidential in their position towards Jehoshaphat as Nathan and Gad had been to the son of Jesse in a former generation. Nor was he honoured only by the prophets of his own kingdom. Elisha paid him all dutiful respect, and treated him as the friend of his order and the recognised servant of Jehovah.³

It was natural that such a ruler should strive to purify and reinvigorate the national worship, which had been corrupted and left to fall into neglect. Asa, his father, had begun a great reformation; Jehoshaphat zealously carried it out. All the high places consecrated to idol worship were destroyed, though those used for the worship of Jehovah were left standing. He strove, moreover, to restore the Temple worship to its ancient glory, establishing choirs of Levites and providing in every

¹ Isa. i. 21.

² Among others, the 47th and 58th.

³ 2 Chron. xix. 1-3, 13, 37; 1 Kings xxii. 5, 7; 2 Kings iii. 11, 14; 2 Chron. xvii. 34; xix. 3; xx. 3, 4; xxi. 12.

detail for the proper observance of the Temple duties. Nor were the people indifferent. Their public thanksgiving after the battle of Tekoa showed the healthy religious feeling of the day.

But so intelligent a man felt that the only sure basis of permanent loyalty to the national faith must be a wise education of the whole community. He therefore appointed a body of sixteen instructors to go from place to place through the land and teach the people the Law. His breadth of mind showed itself in such a scheme, but still more in the fact that of the sixteen, five were laymen, and that these stood first on the Commission.

The same genius for organization showed itself also in another direction. No country can be permanently prosperous without the safeguard of wise and firmly executed laws. To secure this benefit for his people Jehoshaphat remodelled the judicial arrangements of the kingdom. Courts were established in every walled town, with judges at their head, assisted by a body of lay and priestly assessors. Under these were Levitical scribes as clerks, to register the decisions, and as officers to see them carried out. A supreme court, moreover, was set up in Jerusalem ; Levites, priests, and prominent laymen forming the body of judges. In this highest court the High Priest sat as president in all religious questions; the "prince" or head noble of Judah, in all lay disputes; Levites acting here, also, as scribes and executive officers. Such a scheme must have been a signal blessing to the nation, especially so long as the judges kept in mind the charge given them by Jehoshaphat—"Ye are to judge, not for men, to win bribes or favour the strong, but as before Jehovah, the true king of Israel, whose laws you are to administer, and

whose eyes watch you as you sit on the judgment seat. No injustice or respect of persons or taking of bribes, passes unnoticed by Him.”¹

The death of a king so wise and so good was a great calamity to his country. The twenty-five years of his reign are one of the brightest spots in Jewish history.

¹ 2 Chron. xix. 5-7.



AN EGYPTIAN SCRIBE.—Wilkinson.



ATHALIAH.

THE condition of the kingdom of Judah at the death of Jehoshaphat was prosperous in the extreme, but the terrible influence of bad government in an absolute monarchy was soon shown by the state to which it was reduced under his son Jehoram. That prince had been associated with his father on the throne for some years before death opened the way to his independent reign. He was then thirty-two years of age. His brother-in-law Joram, the son of Ahab, had been king in Samaria for two years, in succession to Ahaziah, and his wife Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel and sister of Joram, was in the noonday of her womanhood in Jerusalem. It is strange, but only too often noticed, that the child of a worthy father is not seldom unworthy of its parent, and it was thus in the case of Jehoram. His marriage to Athaliah may itself have been a result of early waywardness, for it is hard to imagine that so good a man as Jehoshaphat would have willingly assented to such a union. In any case, he fell at once under her influence as thoroughly as her father had been dominated by her mother. Like Jezebel, also, she was a fanatic for the heathenism of Tyre—her mother's country,—perhaps, in part, from the fact that her grandfather had been high priest of Baal as well as

king of the great Phenician city. Pride no less than superstition may have decided her inclinations. From the moment of her father-in-law's death, she had set herself to undo the work of his life by superseding the worship of Jehovah in favour of Baal and Astarte, her mother's gods. It was no new thing for Judah to suffer from the heathenism of its queens. Solomon had flattered the foreign ladies of his harem by building altars on the Mount of Olives to their idols, and Rehoboam had been the slave of his heathen mother, Naamah, the Ammonitess, and of his wife Maachah, the granddaughter of Absalom, who was a fierce idolatress. But Athaliah was destined to play a still more fatal part in the story of Judah. Resolute and imperious; full of wild energy; a determined idol-worshipper, she had drawn from her mother's bosom, along with her life, the utter unscrupulousness and callousness of heart and conscience which have made the name of Jezebel an abhorrence for ever.

The opening of her husband's reign gave her the first opportunity of acting openly as his evil genius. To make his throne more secure, he was induced by her to murder all the royal family, as far as possible. Abimelech had, in the same way, killed all the sons of Gideon, but till now, no similar crime had been committed in Judah, though such barbarity was the rule in Phenicia. Jehoshaphat had appointed his six sons as governors of different walled towns, to withdraw them from the luxurious idleness of the palace and give them a career. But their nearness to the throne, no less than their petty dignities, roused the jealousy of Jehoram. That there might be no danger of a rival to the crown, numbers of prominent men supposed to favour them, perished with them. The daughter of the murderess of

Naboth and his sons was in her element in goading a weak husband to emulate Ahab's example of carrying out the will of the tigress, his wife.

Having thus established her power over Jehoram, Athaliah's course was clear to advance the object nearest her heart, by establishing idolatry in the land. High places to Baal and Ashtoreth, or Astarte, rose in the cities of Judah.¹ The worship of Jehovah in the Temple was still permitted, but only as one of a number of gods. Heathenism, thus patronised by the court, threatened to cover the land. Nor was remonstrance on the part of the prophets of any avail. Faithful under Jehoshaphat, they doubtless were equally so towards his son. Even the aged Elijah, for the only time, so far as we know, in the history of the earlier prophets, sent Jehoram a letter denouncing his apostasy and crimes, so like those the seer had lamented in the career of Ahab. But, like that prince, the equally weak-minded husband of Athaliah was a mere tool in the hands of his wife, with the result of covering his reign with shame and almost ruining his country. Edom, dependent on Judah under Jehoshaphat, revolted and set up a native prince as its king, after a massacre of the Jews settled in the land.² An invasion of the rough mountains of Seir, by Jehoram, ended only in disaster. Edom remained free for half a century. The Philistine

¹ 2 Chron. xxi. 1-11, for "mountains," read "cities." The altars of these high places were doubtless raised on earth brought from Phenicia, that the gods might be flattered by worship *on their own soil*. Indeed, as local divinities, they could only be worshipped in a foreign country, by this fiction of making part of it their own territory. So Naaman acted when anxious to raise an altar to Jehovah, for private use, in Damascus (2 Kings v. 17).

² 2 Kings viii. 20; 2 Chron. xxi. 8; Joel iii. 19; Hitzig, *Joel*, p. 88.

country also revolted and broke away from Judah. Allying themselves with some Arab tribes, they even, in their turn, attacked Jerusalem, and succeeded in taking it by storm, after which they sacked the palace, capturing the royal harem and the king's children, with the one exception of Jehoahaz, afterwards known as Ahaziah.¹ Ten years of such a reign alienated the affections of the people. A long and terrible disease which seized Jehoram, seemed a judgment for his crimes and folly, and when he died, at the age of forty-two, no pretence of regret was heard; the customary royal honours at his funeral were withheld, and a grave sought for his body apart from the ashes of his ancestors, with whom he was not counted worthy to lie in the royal tombs.

On the death of Jehoram, his son Jehoahaz or Azariah ascended the throne, but, like his father, he was king only in name. The imperious Athaliah was supreme. Her mother had for the time triumphed in her passion for idolatry. A vast temple to Baal, with four hundred and fifty priests as its staff of clergy, had risen in magnificence in Samaria. Sacred pillars and images glittered on all sides in its courts; a huge statue of Baal rising awfully aloft in the inner shrine. In Jerusalem, the daughter had already built a temple to the same god, perhaps on the same model, in part from the stones of the Temple, now left to fall into decay, and, still worse, the sacred vessels had been taken for the service of the idol. It had, also, its altars, images, and college of priests, under a hierarch—Mattan—the only one of the staff whose name has survived. Heathenism was in vogue. It was supported by the court and, of course, by the courtiers. Tyre, which was even more to Jeru-

¹ 2 Kings ix. 22, 29.

saalem than Paris, in the days of Louis XIV., was to Europe, worshipped Baal, and the genteel world followed the fashion. To be out of that was to be out of the world, then as now. Such a taint naturally spread downwards through the community. The nation was rapidly becoming heathen.

Such a crisis in Judah, added to that created by Jezebel in Samaria, at last brought about its own terrible punishment. The vengeance showed itself first in the northern kingdom. There, the prophets had gradually sapped the power of Ahab and his queen, till the country was ready for their overthrow; and this Jehu, a fierce but crafty soldier, ere long effected with hideous completeness. Jezebel, her son Joram, and the whole royal family of Samaria perished, and with them fell also Ahaziah of Judah, the son of Athaliah, at the age of twenty-three, after a reign of little over a year. For the next six years the fierce queen-mother seized the throne. The vast families of the past reigns—children of many different mothers—had been almost extirpated, and the sons of Ahaziah were too young for power. There were still, however, a number of personages more or less nearly connected with the throne, and Ahaziah's sons, though still so young, would daily grow older. Athaliah, to make her position secure, resolved to put to death not only the more distant connections of the Crown, but to kill her own grandchildren. One only, a baby of two months—the future king Jehoash—escaped. His aunt, a daughter of Jehoram, and wife of the high priest Jehoiada, was able to conceal him and his nurse in a chamber of the priests' quarter of the Temple. The feeble infant was the last representative of the House of David.

Now, at last, for more than six years Athaliah en-

joyed the delights of undivided power, for which she



THE HIGH PRIEST IN HIS OFFICIAL ROBES.

had sold her heart and conscience. For the first time a

queen sat on the Jewish throne, and she a heathen, and only half an Israelite. Jehoiada, the high priest, had held his great position under Jehoshaphat, and was already old. His fidelity to the line of David was unswerving, and no less so his loyalty to Jehovah. To restore the native dynasty and the worship of the national God was his one thought. But delay was necessary. The young king was a baby, and Athaliah was in the flush of power. Time, however, was on the side of the patriot. As a foreigner and heathen, Athaliah was certain to make herself unpopular by her foreign favourites and the subversion of everything Jewish by their influence. That Judah should thus sink to a mere shadow of Tyre was at last intolerable. Jehoiada's opportunity was at hand. It was the seventh year of Athaliah's reign. The high priest had won to his side the officers of the queen's bodyguard of Carians,¹ and her five chief "runners," and having shown the young king to them, had sworn them to defend his rights. He next sent them through the land with a secret invitation to the priests, Levites, and "elders" to assemble at Jerusalem, in all probability on one of the great annual feasts, when their presence would not excite suspicion. To them, also, on their arrival in the capital, the young king, endeared to them as the last of the race of David, their great national hero, was shown, after they had sworn to be loyal to him.

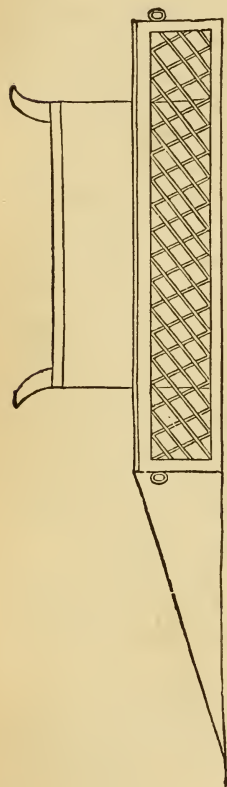
Arrangements for the revolution could now be made. A strong force was appointed to hold the Temple gates and guard the courts of the priests, in the chambers connected with which the young king was concealed. An open space in front was left for sympathizers. The outgoing courses of Levites, instead of leaving the Tem-

¹ Ewald and Graetz.

ple, stayed behind and joined those who should have taken their places : a double strength being thus secured. Spears and shields, small and large, which had belonged to David's guard a hundred and fifty years before, were

brought out and put in the hands of the extemporized soldiery ; the very sight of them helping to fire their zeal for David's descendant. All had weapons of some kind. The revolution was fixed for a Sabbath day, when crowds would fill the Temple courts and grounds.

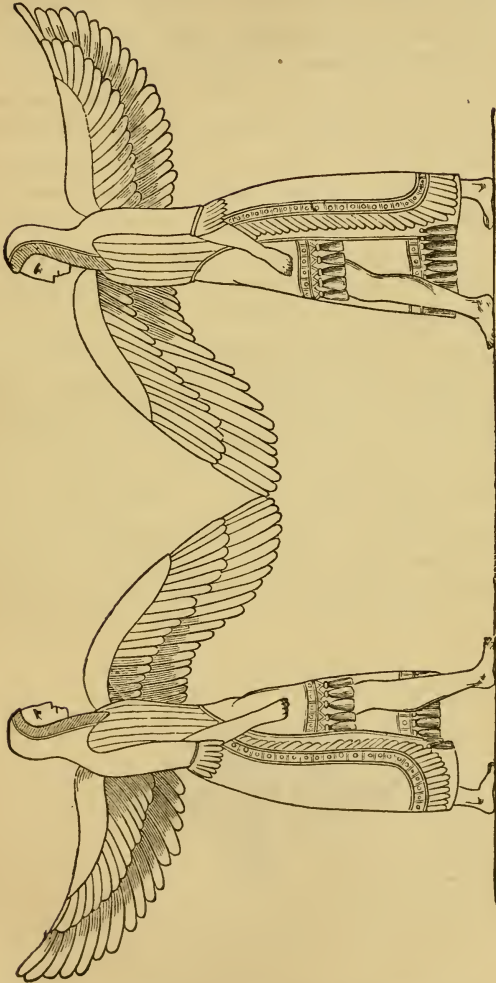
The time having come, the young king was brought out to a central platform raised between the former site of the brazen altar of burnt offering and the Temple, as it were under the wings of the great cherubim who guarded the Holy of Holies. Bands of armed men on each side protected him. A vast crowd filled the wide space in front, and stretched far over the Temple grounds beyond. And now Jehoiada placed the crown on the head of the child-prince, in sight of all, laying gently on it, after doing so, a roll of the Law of Moses, to remind him, in after years, of his most sacred duties.



THE BRAZEN ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING.

Solemn anointing and homage followed. The rod of Jesse had once more blossomed : there was again a king of the root of David. Loud shouts of " God bless the

king" rent the air, with wild clapping of hands and



THE GREAT CHERUBIM IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES.

tumultuous exultation. Athaliah, hitherto unconscious

of danger, now first learnt what was afoot. But she had all her mother's bravery. Commanding her litter to be brought, she instantly came in person to the Temple, where the scene might have appalled even so stout a heart. The prince stood, crowned, on the platform, surrounded by the chief men of the nation, headed by the high priest. Choirs of Levites chanted a coronation psalm; the temple musicians accompanied their voices; the silver trumpets ever and anon pealed forth loud flourishes, and the multitudes in the courts and outside were wildly shouting for the newly consecrated king. Rending her clothes in her rage, she could only scream, "Treason, treason," and wait to see if any movement were made in her favour. But her fate was speedily decided. "Lead her outside the sacred bounds," cried Jehoiada, "and kill her when she is on common ground." The Temple must not be profaned with human blood. Forthwith the command was obeyed. The crowd opening for her, the doomed queen was hurried on till she reached the chariot gate of her palace, and there she was slain.





AHAB.

THE kingdom of Israel remained under the rule of its founder, Jeroboam, for twenty-two years, and then passed to the hands of his surviving son, Nadab. But the Ten Tribes were to feel, that an independence which rested in great measure on the repudiation of Jehovah, and the substitution of local sanctuaries with Egyptian symbols, proscribed by Moses as idolatrous, was, after all, a great mistake. The burdens laid on them by Rehoboam were lighter than those they laid on themselves by breaking away from the religious centre of their race. Time would have quietly removed the former: the latter sank them in ever deeper evil, moral and political.

Nadab, weak and incompetent, held power for little more than a year. An unfortunate attack on the Philistines at Gibbethon, a town apparently on the edge of the sea-plain, west of Samaria, offered an opportunity for a successful conspiracy against him on the part of Baasha, an officer of his army. Besides murdering the king, the usurper set the first example in Israel of the hideous practice, too often followed after him, of killing all the members of the royal house, that there might be no rivals from it to give trouble.

It seems as if hatred of the southern kingdom had

encouraged Baasha in his plot, for, while Nadab turned his arms against the Philistines, Baasha renewed the fierce wars of Jeroboam's days against Judah, as if to crush it entirely. But the fatal error of maintaining the worship of the calves at Dan and Bethel was still upheld, and drew with it the ruin of the new dynasty. Godly Israelites continued to emigrate in large numbers from the northern to the southern kingdom, and popular discontent and disunion grew deeper as the sacred associations of the past lost their power. Baasha, however, maintained his authority for twenty-four years, and left the throne to his son Elah. Yet Israel had steadily sunk under his rule. Asa, king of Judah, alarmed at his building a fortress on the marches of Judah, to facilitate inroads on its territory, called in foreign help, for the first time in the history of Israel; inducing the king of Syria to aid him, by attacking his enemy, which he did with such success as henceforth to paralyze Baasha's activity and give Judah peace.

Elah, his son, like the son of Jeroboam, enjoyed the throne for little more than a year, and, like him, was murdered at Tirzah, his country residence, while helpless in a drunken debauch, the ferocity of Baasha, his father, towards the house of Jeroboam being copied only too faithfully by his own murderer,—Zimri, an officer of his cavalry,—for every male of his race perished with him. But the avenging Nemesis was close behind. Omri, the commander-in-chief of Elah's army, then besieging Gibbethon for the second time, no sooner heard of the revolt, than he raised the siege, and, marching to Tirzah, closely invested it. Ere long the town was taken, and Zimri driven to seek refuge in the citadel which formed part of the royal house, and this he at last set on fire; preferring to perish thus, and

destroy the treasures of the palace with him—perhaps, also, the ladies of the harem—than to suffer either himself or them to fall into the hands of his enemy.

Omri now ascended the vacant throne, but a competitor appeared in the person of one Tibni, who was not crushed till after four years of civil war.

The rise of three dynasties in the space of fifty years marked the instability of the Israelitish kingdom, nor was Omri's reign of twelve years fitted to strengthen it. Following in the steps of Jeroboam, he only deepened the calamities of the nation by still further sapping its religion, through jealousy of the southern Temple.

Ahab, his son, a man weak in some respects, but not wanting in good traits, ascended the throne in the year B.C. 919. His father, Omri, an able and energetic man, had abandoned the ruins of Tirzah, after the terrible end of his predecessor and rival Zimri, and had selected a site for a new capital, with great judgment, in the centre of his kingdom. This spot was the hill of Samaria, henceforward, for two hundred years, till the kingdom finally perished, the seat of the Israelitish government. Bethel, with its Egyptian calves, still, however, remained the chief seat of the religion of the land. Omri had felt that peace was indispensable to enable him to build up his government and restore prosperity to his people, and, hence, at last, Judah had rest from Israelitish wars. He had in the same way made peace with the king of Damascus, preferring to yield some towns to him, on the other side of the Jordan, and to allow the residence of a Syrian representative in Samaria, rather than risk the danger of further strife.

It seems as if the fatal alliance which ruined Ahab had been made for him by his father. Bent on pro-

moting the wealth and prosperity of his kingdom, nothing seemed more likely to help both than the marriage of his son with a Tyrian princess, who, however, showed herself very far from a blessing to the nation, for she was no other than Jezebel.

Phenicia was at that time in its glory. Its position gave it great facilities for commerce, and the energy of its people had made their name "Canaanite," synonymous with "merchant" among neighbouring races. Two hundred years before Ahab's day they had founded Cadiz, on the Atlantic, and Utica in North Africa. Thence they had extended their territory along the coasts of Spain and the north and west of Africa, besides occupying many of the islands of the Mediterranean. At an incredibly early date we find them in Cyprus and Egypt, in Greece and Sicily, in Africa and Spain: indeed, even, as I have said, on the Atlantic, and in the Northern Ocean. Their trade extended from Sierra Leone and Cornwall on the west to the coast of Malabar on the east: through their hands passed the gold and pearls of the east, the purple of Tyre, the slaves, the ivory, the lion and leopards' skins of Central Africa, the incense of Arabia, the linen of Egypt, the pottery and noble wines of Greece, the copper of Cyprus, the silver of Spain, the tin of England, and the iron of Elba. Tyre was the Venice of antiquity: her ships were on many waters: her merchants were princes.

But the genius of Phenicia was essentially of a sordid type. Though of the same race as the Hebrews, and speaking a cognate dialect, they ignored the spiritual characteristics which have made the Jew the benefactor of the world. Neither in religion, science, nor art, did they ever take an independent position.

Lust and cruelty were inwoven with their faith and worship. They have left no art such as glorified the Greeks; and they followed science only so far as it bore on the wants of their commerce. They utterly failed to impress their characteristics on the nations they encountered in trade, or invaded by colonies, and were wholly wanting in the genius for government which marks the Indo-Germanic race. Through all their history their first thought was gain. Feeling that the closing of the routes of traffic would cost more than the heaviest tax, they were willing rather to be tributary to Egypt, Babylon, or Nineveh, than to fight for independence. Freedom had no charms for them, in comparison with ignoble wealth. Their untruthfulness became a proverb; their frightful harshness to the native tribes round their colonies in Africa was, in the end, fatal to themselves; and the sensuality and cruelty of their religious rites were the scandal of antiquity. Mammon is a Phenician word: Beelzebub was a Phenician god: and the temples of Baal and Astarte, the special deities of the State, were sinks of unmentionable vice.

Into the royal family of this people Omri married his son and heir, Ahab. The bride's name was Jezebel—"The chaste one." She was the daughter of Ethbaal,— "Baal's man,"—a priest of Astarte,— "The moon,"— who had murdered his brother, the king of Tyre, and seized the throne. The alliance seemed at the time a great stroke of policy, by linking Israel to the wealthiest community of the day, and thus opening to it avenues of material prosperity unknown before. It has been thought, indeed, by some¹ that the forty-fifth Psalm

¹ Hitzig, Stein, and Ewald favour this idea. Delitzsch thinks it was the marriage of Joram, son of Jehoshaphat, with Athaliah,

has preserved to us the marriage ode of some unknown poet of Israel, written to welcome Jezebel to Samaria. If so, how sadly must the dreams of the nation have been disappointed alike in Ahab and her! The bridegroom may have been fairer than the sons of men, and gracious in his words and bearing, but the fond belief in his devotion to Jehovah was soon to be dashed! He is painted as coming forth from his ivory palace in robes perfumed with myrrh, aloes, and cassia, and as having in his harem kings' daughters, while his queen stood at his right hand in gold of Ophir. King's daughter she, too, was, and she came to the king all glorious in her bridal array, for it was embroidered throughout with gold, and with gorgeous many-coloured work of the needle. Nor did she come alone; her bridesmaids were with her, and her people had sent rich gifts from Tyre! Can it be that this was the Epithalamium of the haughty and remorseless Jezebel, the worthy daughter of a royal murderer?

Ahab began his reign with the same general policy his father Omri had followed: to live at peace with Judah, and to do his utmost to develop the resources of his kingdom. Like many Eastern kings he had a taste for magnificence, which showed itself in extensive architecture, and reckless luxury. Commerce had advanced greatly through Israel in the preceding generations, and hence, while Solomon himself was contented with having a throne of ivory, Ahab could boast of a house coated with plates of it. He embellished the

the daughter of Ahab; Moll that of Solomon with the Egyptian princess; while others have had various fancies respecting it. But, in any case, the poet unconsciously prefigured a far higher than any earthly alliance, for his words are in every way a fitting anticipation of the relations of the Messiah to His Church.

country with new cities, and especially signalized his reign by his choice of Jezreel as a royal town, and by his sumptuous erections in it, which made it the Versailles of the Israelitish monarchy. For the first time since the days of Joshua, Jericho also was rebuilt by one Heli, a Benjamite, though its restoration cost the life of two sons of its second founder, as if to verify the curse pronounced by Joshua on its rebuilding.

But Ahab had the fatal weakness of surrendering himself blindly to the wishes of his Tyrian wife, who was devoted to the heathenism of her race. To please her he built a temple to Baal in Samaria, and raised an Asherah, or pillar, sacred to the moon; and he further allowed her to maintain a vast establishment of four hundred and fifty priests and prophets of Baal, and four hundred of Astarte. Nothing could have been more ruinous to the country than the sensuality and grossness of the new worship, nor anything more fitted to bring down the wrath of God upon it. The only choice left to the people was the ox worship of Dan and Bethel, or the hideous pollutions of Phenician idolatry.

The attacks on Israel by Syria, which had begun through the instigation of King Asa of Judah, in the reign of Baasha, had continued through Omri's reign, till a humiliating peace had made Israel almost a dependent state. Under Ahab this state of things was not allowed to continue. Benhadad had, apparently, besieged the city, and having, as it seemed, almost reduced it, sent messengers to the wall to demand acknowledgment of his superiority. "Your silver and gold, your wives and children," they were instructed to say, "are as good as mine. Do homage to me, and pay tribute from them all freely, and I shall withdraw!" Unwilling to provoke his mighty neighbour, Ahab

readily assented to humble himself personally, and to pay the tribute demanded. But his readiness to yield only raised Benhadad's demands. He would not now content himself with Ahab's treasures, but required that he should plunder his dependents also, and even the city at large.

Calling together the elders and principal men, Ahab asked their counsel, and was spiritedly advised to refuse such a haughty summons. Acting on this he closed the town gates, and prepared for defence, Benhadad sending back a threat that the dust of the town, when it was brought to ruin, as it would be, would not suffice to give a handful apiece to the mighty host he had with him. But Ahab was stout-hearted. "Tell Benhadad," he replied, through his servants, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." Nor was he disappointed. Learning soon after, through a prophet, that the Syrian king was holding a great feast with his chief officers in the extemporized tents of branches which formed the encampment, he organized a vigorous sally, with seven thousand men, and taking the enemy by surprise, utterly routed them.

Benhadad was not, however, to be shaken off by one defeat. Damascus had held Israel in its power for many years, and he hoped to recover his prestige by a second campaign. Ahab had taken all his horses and chariots, but he roused himself to a great effort to overpower him, notwithstanding. With the simple ideas of early antiquity he accounted for his defeat by fancying that the gods of the Israelites were hill-gods, who would be powerless in the lowlands, but had been irresistible when a hill city like Samaria had been attacked. To give greater unity to his force, he dis-

missed the vassal kings who had been present, with their contingents, in the former campaign, and having raised a huge levy from his own subjects, advanced with them to the neighbourhood of Aphek, in the wide plains of Esdraelon. Ahab's army seemed helpless before such a host, which covered the wide plain, while those who were to oppose it seemed only, to use the vivid figure of Scripture, like a flock of goats on the hill side, above them.

After watching each other for seven days, Ahab was able at last to make a sudden swoop on the vast crowd arrayed against him, and, as before, threw them into utter confusion and rout. The disordered wreck fled to Aphek, which was presently besieged; the walls undermined, and a breach thus opened. Benhadad himself, moreover, was taken prisoner, while many thousands of his men perished in the crash of the wall, and in the storming.

Ahab had now an opportunity, as the reward of his manly courage and decisive military skill, of freeing himself from the risk of future peril from the same source. But he was soft and kind-hearted to weakness. A deputation, clothed in sackcloth, and wearing halters, in token of utter submission, having come from Benhadad, who was shut up helpless in the citadel, Ahab weakly let himself be cozened into granting the easiest terms to his inveterate enemy, whose very defeat was certain to bring future trouble, if strength enough were left him to give it. The deputation humbly asked him to grant "his servant" Benhadad his life; but Ahab replied that he was "his brother," and asking him to be sent out, caused him to ascend his own chariot to show that he treated him as an equal. The humbled king was profuse in promises. He would restore the towns

his father had taken from Omri, and would allow a permanent Jewish embassy in Damascus, as a sign of superiority, like that which his father had had in Samaria. But he offered no security for keeping his word, and Ahab foolishly demanded none, but contenting himself with a paper treaty, set him free, to prepare for a third campaign at the earliest opportunity. In that campaign, as we shall see, Ahab himself perished.





JEZEBEL.

THE terrible evil of an unfortunate marriage on the part of a reigning prince was never shown more strikingly than in that of Ahab with Jezebel. The ruin of Antony by his mistress Cleopatra ; the perversion of the Stuarts to Romanism by the influence of Henrietta Maria, with all its disasters to the country and the family, and the example in our own days of war excited for sectarian ends, by the power of a priesthood over the wife of a European sovereign, find a terrible anticipation in the results of Jezebel's becoming queen at Samaria.

Her marriage was a turning point in the history of Israel. Sprung from a family marked by its ferocious spirit and religious fanaticism, she inherited its worst qualities in excess. Her father united the priesthood of Astarte with the royalty of Tyre, and had gained the throne by fratricide. In the next generation one member of the house was at the same time king and high priest of Baal, another was guilty of murder, and a third was Elisa or Dido, the energetic foundress of Carthage. What Mary of Guise was to be to the Protestants of Scotland, or Catherine de Medici to the Huguenots of France, Jezebel was to prove herself to the worshippers of Jehovah in Israel, while her

personal character was destined to make her name a proverb for mingled haughtiness, fanaticism, and profligacy.

She had no sooner won the hand of Ahab than she virtually seated herself on his throne, and made him her slave. Fascinated by her strength of character, her arts, and perhaps her beauty, Ahab became a mere plaything in her hands, to carry out her whims and passions. As the daughter of a priest she brought with her a fanatical zeal for the idolatry of her native city, and in her imperiousness determined, apparently from the first, to root out the worship of Jehovah in her husband's kingdom, and substitute that which she favoured. Herself apparently licentious,¹ prone to superstitious arts, and identified with the sensual rites of her favourite idolatry, she induced Ahab ere long to build a grand temple to Baal in Samaria, with the statue of the god in its holy of holies, and many others of different Syrian gods in its forecourt, while a lofty tower, perhaps the chambers of the priests, rose high over all.² To give fitting pomp to the services in this splendid building, she brought four hundred and fifty priests from Tyre, and, no doubt, a much larger number of assistants and temple servants. At Jezreel, where Ahab had built his summer palace, she would not rest satisfied till he had built another heathen temple to Astarte, with a grove round it, and a huge Asherah pillar, the symbol of a third Syrian idol.

It is almost impossible to realize in a Christian age what was implied in this revolution. That Beelzebub—"the Lord of the heavenly palace"—one of the names of Baal, should have been adopted by the Hebrews as

¹ 2 Kings ix. 22; Rev. ii. 20.

² 2 Kings iii. 2; x. 25, 27.

that of the prince of devils, casts a lurid light on the horrors of the worship paid that god. Astarte symbolized the moon, as Baal did the shining Syrian sun, and was worshipped even by the corrupted Jews as the Queen of heaven. What the rites of this idol were may be judged from universal prostitution forming a part of them. The Asherah—an old Semitic goddess—was associated with rites if possible more horrible. Nor is it to be forgotten that one form of Baal—that of Baal Hamman—was the Moloch of the Jews, to whom children were burned alive as the most acceptable sacrifices. This grisly idol was made of brass, with a human body and limbs, and the head of an ox, and it was hollow within. The children to be burned alive were laid on its extended arms, fire was kindled within and before it, and drums were beaten furiously to drown the shrieks of the victims as they rolled off into the flames.¹

Against this foul idolatry which was destined to degrade the northern tribes to the level of their heathen neighbours, till they were finally driven by Jehovah from the land they polluted, into that Assyrian banishment in which they were finally lost, there were not wanting faithful souls to raise a stern resistance at its first introduction. The example of the king and queen naturally set the fashion, and the defection from Jehovah-worship spread till it needed a Divine assurance to cheer Elijah, by the intimation that there were still seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. The schools of the prophets, founded originally, as it seems, by Samuel, and still true to his spirit, furnished a steadfast array of confessors and fearless defenders of the faith of their fathers, who threatened to prevent the triumph of the worship which Jezebel

¹ See illustration in *Hours with the Bible*, vol. iii., p. 366.

had determined to make universal. But her fierce and resolute spirit stopped at nothing to gain her end. A relentless persecution was commenced against the leaders and followers of the old religion.¹ A hundred of the prophets owed their lives to the courage and fidelity of Obadiah, the "governor" of Ahab's palace, rightly called by the name he bore—"The servant of Jehovah."

But there was one spirit as fearless, and far more lofty than that of Jezebel, before whom her cherished heathenism was doomed to suffer a terrible blow—that of Elijah. Clothed with miraculous powers, and daring the wrath of the queen, the prophet threw himself in the way of Ahab, whom he overawed, hurling back upon him the accusation of being the troubler of Israel, and obtained consent to summon all the prophets, both of Baal and Astarte, eight hundred and fifty in number, to Mount Carmel. There, on an appointed day, they all gathered, amidst a vast concourse of the people, who, after the helplessness of the god had been shown, and the awful power of Jehovah, were so stirred that, at Elijah's command, they fell on the idolatrous priests, and massacred them to the last man.

Ahab had remained passive during this wild scene, for he very likely had little interest in the worship so dear to his wife, and rather suffered than favoured it. But if he were indifferent, or terrified into assent, Jezebel retained all her presence of mind. Undismayed by the popular support given so sternly to Elijah, or by the signs of a higher power he had shown, she could think only of vengeance, and imprecated destruction on herself if, before another day closed, he, also, were not

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 13; 2 Kings ix. 7.

put to death. "So let the gods do to me, and more also," cried the imperious woman, "if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." Elijah had braved the fury of a king, and had faced the whole multitude of the prophets of Baal, but he quailed before the threats of the awful queen, and fled for his life, even beyond Judah, to the distant region of Horeb, in the far south. She was only queen, and, as such, had no legitimate power, but Ahab was not even mentioned in her vow of revenge. He had sunk to be the mere instrument of her pleasure.

But it was not enough that the weak man—weak, rather than deliberately wicked—had involved himself in his wife's guilt by introducing idolatry, and stained his hands in the blood of martyrs by acquiescence in her persecution of the servants of Jehovah; he was to be dragged down by her to a still lower depth.

Courageous and manly at times, he was, as a rule, weak and effeminate. He had yielded entirely to Jezebel, till she was the real king; and though he fought bravely against the Syrians, he had at first been ready to yield to them without resistance, and wanted firmness to use his victory when Benhadad was in his power. A citizen of Jezreel, Naboth by name, had a vineyard which Ahab wished to buy, for enclosure in the royal park. But, like a true Israelite, to whom the sale of the family inheritance was forbidden, Naboth would not part with it, and his refusal to do so fretted the weak king, so that he took to his bed and turned his face to the wall, ill with mortification at having any wish, however trifling, thwarted.

Jezebel, however, was equal, in her own remorseless way, to the occasion. Taunting her husband with his weakness, she asked him "if he really were king?—if

so, he would have little trouble to get his wish. If he would not act as became a king, she would do so, and would speedily give him the vineyard he coveted. There was no need for his fretting : he might rise, eat, and be merry.”

Then followed a piece of consummate wickedness which raises her to an awful pre-eminence in crime. She drew up an order in Ahab's name, but without his knowledge, that the elders of Jezreel should carry out a plot against Naboth with all the forms of law, and put him to death at once, though he was guilty of no offence ; and to this order she affixed the royal seal. It was only too faithfully carried out by the terrified authorities, not only on Naboth, but also on his sons,¹ and Ahab had the vineyard of the murdered man as she had promised. But it marks the difference between him and her, that when Elijah had once more put himself in his way, and denounced the crime in the very vineyard itself, predicting Ahab's death and the extinction of his house on account of it, “ he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and fasted and went softly ”—humbled in soul at the deed to which he had become a party by accepting its results.

His death, which happened perhaps soon after this, left Jezebel a widow. Benhadad, having recovered from his losses, once more attacked Israel, and for three years sought to crush it. At last Ahab, having made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, determined, in spite of the warning of a true prophet, to besiege Ramoth in Gilead, an old Israelitish town now in the hands of Syria ; the forces of Judah co-operating with his own. True to his character he marked his setting out on the campaign by imprisoning the prophet

¹ 2 Kings ix. 26.

who had spoken unwelcome truth, and rewarding the impostors who had flattered him !

A battle had to be fought with Benhadad's army before the siege could be begun, but Ahab, though personally brave, was too much awed by the warning he had received to lead on his forces in his full royal robes, as was the custom. Disguising himself, therefore, that he might not be a special aim, he joined in the fight. But the doom predicted found him out. An arrow shot at a venture, pierced the weakly-protected part below his breast-plate, and inflicted a mortal wound. He would not, however, flee, though he felt himself mortally stricken. He had been bravely facing the enemy, and now, lest his retirement should discourage his troops, he made his attendants hold him up in his chariot, while life lasted, standing through the awful hours in his own blood, to secure the victory to his side ! He had reigned twenty-two years.

Jezebel, now a middle-aged woman, survived her husband fourteen years, and, as queen mother,—a very important personage in Eastern monarchies,—still retained much of her evil influence in the court of her sons, Ahaziah and Joram. The short reign of the former, for he died two years after his accession, saved him from the terrible fate rapidly coming on his house. His brother, Joram, succeeded him ; and under him Jezebel had the mortification of seeing Baal worship discouraged, though the ox-worship at Bethel was still maintained.

At last, after a reign of eleven years, the revolution effected by Jehu brought the fulfilment of all that had been predicted against Ahab and his family. Jehu had been one of the body-guard of Ahab, and had ridden with him to the vineyard of Naboth, when Elijah met him

and foretold that he would be requited on that very spot, for his share in Naboth's murder; and the listener had stored the words in his heart. An opportunity for conspiring against the dynasty first offered itself when Joram was recovering from a wound received in battle with the Syrians. A prophet having then anointed Jehu as the future king, to carry out the Divine vengeance, he took advantage of Joram's helplessness to ride to Jezreel and put him to death. Ahaziah, king of Judah, the son of Joram's sister Athaliah, Jezebel's daughter, having come out with Joram to meet Jehu, shared his fate. Jezebel's hour, also, had now come, and she met her death with a spirit worthy of her life. Painting her eyelids and decorating her head, she deliberately posed herself at a window to see the rebel when he came, and at once, on his appearing, warned him of the fate of Zimri, who, after a successful revolt and the murder of his king, had been burned alive. But there was only vengeance in the fierce Puritan's heart. Looking up, he demanded who was on his side, and ordered two or three eunuchs who looked out, to throw the queen over. Another moment and she lay mangled on the ground, the blood sprinkling the wall and the breasts of Jehu's horses, as he crushed out the last remains of life under their hoofs and the wheels of his chariot. No one was left to do her honour in her death, and she lay there till the city dogs, ever on the watch for food, ate all but the hard parts of her skeleton—the skull, the hands, and the feet! The words of Elijah had come literally true. .





ELIJAH.

THE "prophet" stands in antiquity as the unique distinction of the Hebrew faith. In modern ages the Dervishes of Asia have supplied in Mahommedanism some of his special characteristics, in their fearless protests in behalf of the right when invaded by either prince or people, but they come short in many ways of the ideal of the Jewish prophet, while they are outside of it in others. The prophets among the Egyptians were only the highest kinds of priests, specially devoted to superstitious observances, which Moses strictly prohibited in Israel. In Greece and Rome they either confined themselves to this sphere, or gave forth oracles from the sacred recesses of temples. But in Palestine, among the Hebrews, the prophet was a political power no less than a religious : he forbade or advised change of government or of policy ; inaugurated revolutions by the consecration of successors to existing dynasties ; counselled kings, priests, and people ; urged wars or denounced them ; and moved in the nation as the representative of the invisible King of Israel, in whose name he spoke with a paramount authority.

Among this illustrious order Elijah is the most illustrious. Born among the mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan, the home of wandering pastoral tribes, un-

settled and untamed in their characters as in their lives, he comes before us with many of the characteristics of the half-Arab clans to which he belonged. His sudden appearances and withdrawals; his magnificent fearlessness, and his grand fidelity to Jehovah in an age of general apostasy, are in keeping with the freedom and restless life of the people among whom his lot was cast.

To realize Elijah's character and acts, it is necessary to remember the circumstances of the times. The worship of Jehovah, rudely shaken by the introduction of the Egyptian ox-worship, as a symbol, at Dan and Bethel, had been well-nigh crushed by the support weakly lent by Ahab to the idolatrous fanaticism of his wife Jezebel. A gorgeous temple to Baal adorned Samaria; another equally splendid had been raised at Jezreel. Eight hundred and fifty priests, and a corresponding multitude of lower attendants, gave pomp and grandeur to the worship of the idols. The sensuality of the rites; the influence of the court and throne as leaders of fashion; the relentless persecution of Jehovah-worshippers on the one hand, and the open road to promotion offered by apostasy on the other, had resulted in an apparently complete victory for the new religion. So far as Elijah could see, he was himself the last survivor of those who clung to the faith of their fathers.

That he did cling to it even when thus, as it seemed, alone; that he braved court and throne, to maintain the true national faith, and ventured even into the presence of Ahab as an open confessor of Jehovah, was itself the ideal of heroism. He was unsuccessful in leading back Israel to a true and lasting homage to Jehovah, but he broke the power of Baal-worship so that it never recovered its prestige, and he paved the way for the terrible reformation by Jehu.

His first appearance is startling by its abrupt introduction. Without a word of preparation, the story of Ahab's surrender to idolatry is followed by the intimation of Elijah announcing to the king that, "as the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be no dew these years, but according to my word." Dressed in a rude mantle of sheep-skin, tied round him, as is still the custom of the poorest, by a leathern girdle or belt, and fastened, it is likely, with the thorn of some desert shrub, his long hair hanging down his back, he ventures into the presence of Ahab, in spite of all peril, and proclaims himself as the unswerving servant of Jehovah, whom he is not ashamed to reverence as the God of Israel, in opposition to all idols. He comes and goes like an apparition. The famine, caused by want of rain, begins to afflict the land, but a safe retreat is found for him by Divine direction in the depths of the wady of some of the streams which, in ordinary seasons, leap from ledge to ledge of the Eastern tableland into the Jordan. There he is fed by miracle, till the brook dries up. Then traversing Israel, he is sent to the very land of Baal: the district above all others least likely to be searched for the great opponent of Baal-worship. There he spends many months, bringing a blessing to the lonely widow who has entertained him, till, at last, when the drought has lasted over three years, he is once more commanded by God to throw himself in the path of Ahab.

The want of water in the land had become a terrible calamity, affecting all alike, from the king to the peasant. The horses and cattle were everywhere dying, till, as a last resource, Ahab himself and the chief officer of his palace, Obadiah, set out to search everywhere for springs or brooks not yet wholly dried

up. It is while he is on this journey that Obadiah suddenly encounters the prophet and receives from him a command to go and tell Ahab that Elijah is there. But even to mention the dreaded name was too much for the courage of one who, nevertheless, had faithfully hidden and fed, in the fierce persecution, a hundred of the prophets of Jehovah. He feared that Elijah would disappear as suddenly as he had shown himself, and leave him to brave the fury of the king. Only on the prophet's assurance that he would in very deed await Ahab, would the messenger undertake the errand.

The interview as narrated is striking in the extreme. To Ahab's angry greeting, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" he returns the cutting retort, that it was not he but Ahab himself who did so, by setting up the worship of Baal. Then, as if speaking to one whom he expected to obey his orders, he commanded the king to summon all the prophets of the false worship to Carmel, a range of hills stretching to the sea, at the southwestern extremity of the plain of Esdraelon, and thus far from Jezebel and Jezreel. In the ravines of that district Elijah had apparently found a refuge, from time to time, and here the great trial was to be made between Jehovah and his Tyrian rivals. It is not necessary to go over the particulars of the incident. The failure of the priests of Baal to effect what Elijah demanded had already excited the multitude gathered to witness the scene, and this enthusiasm was heightened and made irrepressible by the instant vindication of His honour on the part of Jehovah, so that it needed but the stern word of Elijah to make the crowd rush on the false prophets and massacre them on the spot.

Jezreel lay over sixteen miles off, and thither Ahab, who had remained passive under the spell of a stronger will

than his own, now hastened his chariot, for the sky had grown black with clouds and threatened to prevent his return, if it were not immediate, by swelling the torrents of the plain. But the physical endurance of Elijah, even after the exertions of the day, was to be wonderfully shown. As if to do honour to Ahab for his readiness to put the question between God and the idols to the test, he tightened his girdle, as Arabs are wont to do, and thus prepared, ran before the galloping horses of the king, the whole sixteen miles, to the entrance of Jericho.

But he had to do with one on whose stability of purpose no reliance could be placed. Once more in Jezreel, beside Jezebel, the ferocious queen knew how to turn Ahab from his friendly leaning towards the ancient faith, and from Elijah its great representative. In keeping with the weakness of his character he attempted nothing himself, but he left Jezebel free to threaten Elijah with instant death as soon as he could be found. The sudden revulsion from the excitement and triumph of Carmel to proscription and imminent danger, seemed to have made the prophet's triumph over Baal and his followers worse than resultless, and the necessity for instant solitary flight, without a moment's preparation, at last broke down the iron strength of even his soul. Speeding southwards across Judah, in which he could not rest, from its alliance with Ahab, he found himself presently on the edge of the desert at Beersheba, and thence, after being miraculously fed, he hastened to the depths of the great mountain chain of Sinai. He had done his utmost for God, and seemed as if forsaken. His foes appeared to triumph. The cause so dear to him appeared crushed, and he sank well-nigh into despair.

But Horeb was not the place for a man of such strong energy, so fearless, so faithful. A vision granted him of the presence and favour of that Jehovah he had so faithfully served, once more roused him to fresh zeal, and led him to bend his steps back again to the abodes of men. He could not, however, venture, except for passing moments, into the territories of Ahab, or even of Judah, but went first to Syria, where he had been commissioned to anoint Hazael as the future king, though, to do so, the reigning dynasty of Benhadad would need first to be displaced. Years after, it was rudely thrust aside by the common Eastern solution of political difficulties—murder. Nor was this the only matter in which Elijah was ordered to carry out the peculiar office of the Hebrew prophet, by directing the politics of the country. The sin of Ahab had finally drawn on him the Divine sentence of degradation from the throne, for himself and his dynasty, and another was to be consecrated in his room while he still reigned. The choice fell on Jehu, as a zealous supporter of Jehovah, destined to destroy the idolatrous house of Omri, and found a dynasty faithful to the national religion. In another than a theocracy the consecration of a subject as future king would be the most criminal treason, for there could be no more direct incentive to conspiracy and revolution, but in Israel it was only the legal execution on an offending ruler of the sentence of his superior—the true Lord of the land—Jehovah, with whom rested the absolute right to raise to the throne or to cast down from it.

After the first Syrian war Elijah returned once more to the territory of Israel, but remained, as before, far from the court and capital. A tragic incident was, however, to call him to both for a moment. Ahab, in

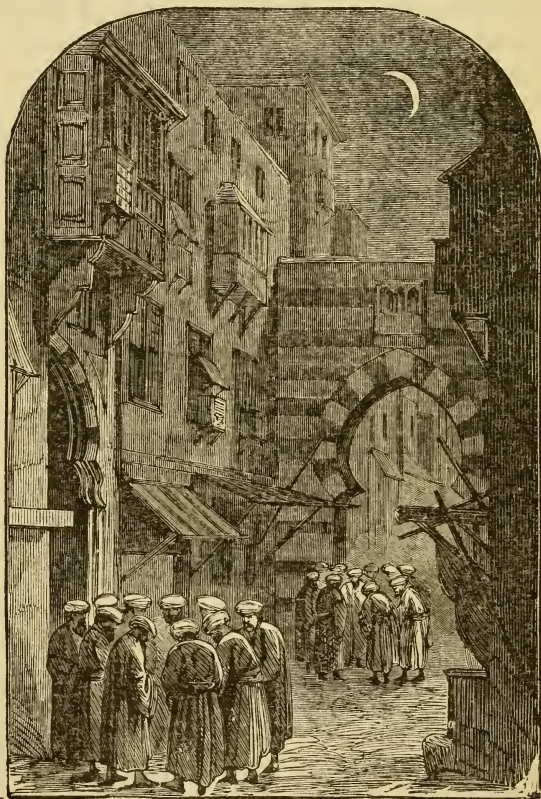
his desire to enlarge the gardens of his palace at Jezreel, had set his heart on buying a vineyard which bordered it, but the owner, Naboth, refused to sell it. Like a spoiled child, that could not get all its fancies indulged, Ahab let the disappointment prey on him till it was noticed by Jezebel, who had no such scruples to overcome in gaining her ends as kept back Ahab. Once more she showed herself his bad angel. Concocting a deep-laid plot, she raised an accusation of blasphemy against the innocent Naboth, and, by the craven assistance of the officials of the town, had him and his sons stoned to death. Ahab himself would never have acted thus, but he became partner in the guilt by taking the vineyard, which fell to his hands as its result.

The news of this hideous crime brought Elijah once more to Jezreel. Ahab had ridden with two attendants to the new property, acquired at such a cost, to take possession of it, and to plan its incorporation with his grounds, when suddenly he was confronted by the dreaded prophet. When he had seen Elijah last he had been honoured by him for his action against the prophets of Baal, but now the hated man stood there to arraign and condemn him and his house. The stern Witness for Jehovah had no longer any pity in his denunciation: the blood of Ahab would be shed in the spot which had been stained by that of Naboth, and his house would be rooted out from the land.

The close of Elijah's life saw the appointment of Elisha as his successor, and then followed his mysterious translation to heaven without his having seen death. Alone of men he once again reappeared on earth, after having left it without suffering the change of mortality. On the Mount of Transfiguration he stood as the representative of the Prophets, with Moses

the representative of the Law, to do homage to Him by whom both were superseded.

He was in every way a type of the Old Dispensation. His mission, like that of the wind, the lightning, and the tempest, was from God; but as these were only the precursors of the still small voice, so he was but the forerunner of the calmer and more Divine manifestation in a loving and tender Saviour.



ORIENTAL STREET, WITH JEWS PRAYING AT THE APPEARANCE OF THE NEW MOON.



ELISHA.

THE loneliness that had oppressed even the spirit of Elijah when he fled to Horeb, was soon after relieved by the faithful attendance of a companion and helper, who was very much the same to him as Joshua had been to Moses, the great prophet of the nation. By Divine direction he passed a spot in the deep course of the Jordan, about three hours south of Bethshean, called Abel Meholah—"the meadow of the dance"—on his way north to Damascus. It was one of the few reaches of arable land in the sunken bed of the river, below the Lake of Galilee, and was, doubtless, almost tropically fruitful, as its position secured it almost more than a tropical heat in the moist air of the stream.

A large part of the land here belonged to one Elisha—"El is his salvation"—the son of a personage known as "Shaphat"—"The Judge"—most probably a local judicial dignitary. Elisha had given himself to the farming of his ample inheritance, and like a prudent and busy man, though he had eleven ploughs going when Elijah passed, was himself guiding a twelfth, at once, we may suppose, for economy and oversight. His house was most probably on the higher land, above the deep sultry cleft where his acres lay.

In such a man, surrounded with all the comforts of

an easy competence, Elijah had been instructed to find his future assistant and friend. Nor was he disappointed. Approaching him as he was ploughing, the prophet—well known by his dress and hair—threw over him his sheepskin mantle, as if to claim him as his own, and passed on, leaving the significant act to work its own effect. Elisha at once understood its meaning, left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, who had

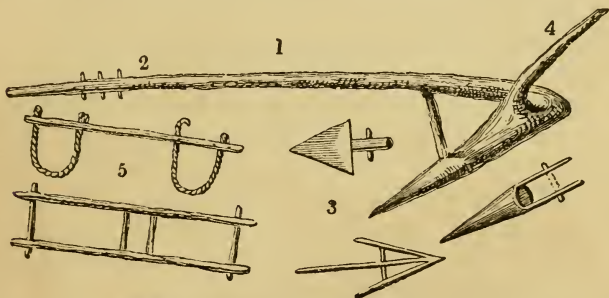


MODERN EGYPTIAN PLOUGH.—From *L'Egyppte, Etat Moderne*.

hurried away. "Let me, I pray thee," said he, "kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." "Go, turn back (to your father's house)," replied Elijah, "(but remember) what I have done to thee; (henceforth thou art consecrated to Jehovah)!" One last parting with those he loved, and he was, henceforth, Elijah's faithful attendant, rendering him all personal service, and at the same time, preparing to take his

place when he should be removed. We must think of him as a young man, when thus summoned to leave all and follow the prophet, for we find him engaged in his office as prophet more than sixty years after.¹

Elisha was in many respects the opposite of his illustrious master. Though he looked on him as the ideal, to possess whose spirit in double measure was the highest honour, his disposition was apparently gentler, more tender, and sympathetic. They both lived at a time when the decay of religion and morals had come to their worst in Israel, and idolatry had even begun to



THE SYRIAN PLOUGH OF THE PRESENT DAY.

1. The Plough. 2. The Pole. 3. The Share (various). 4. The Handle, or Plough Tail. 5. Yokes.

persecute the ancient faith. Prophets who rose in such days and stood loyally by the creed of their fathers, could hardly avoid occasional sternness. Wherever they turned they saw apostasy and crime. The very schools of the prophets had become infected with the general taint, for Ahab could gather together four hundred false prophets² at a time—false prophets of Jehovah, not of Baal.

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 14. Elisha died in the reign of Joash. From the fourth year before Ahab's death to the second year of Joash was sixty-five years.

² 2 Chron. xviii. 5.

Such times left their impress on both Elijah and Elisha, for both were marked by a fiery zeal hardly in keeping with our gentler conceptions of the religious character; both were occasionally stern and harsh in their treatment of the offending, though both—insensible to flattery or self-interest—showed a uniform loftiness in presence of the great which commands our admiration.

Elijah led a wandering restless life of poverty and hardship, and Elisha forsook comparative affluence to be his lowly attendant. But here the resemblance in their mode of life almost ends. Elijah was a true son of the desert. The wild gorge of the Cherith, the shaggy ravines of Carmel, the shrubs of the Desert, the cave at Horeb, were his natural haunts. He never entered a city except to deliver some message, and leave again for the open spaces of nature, where alone he breathed free. Elisha, on the contrary, is a citizen from first to last. No sooner is Elijah removed, than he settles at the newly restored town of Jericho, where a school of the prophets attracted him. He goes thence to Samaria, where he occupied a house as a townsman,¹ and shared in the ordinary life of the day. So thoroughly, indeed, is he a venerated citizen, that the king himself comes to visit him as he lies a-dying.²

Elisha lived and acted as prophet in the reign of six kings of Israel. He appears to have joined Elijah three or four years before Ahab's death, and thus knew all the story of that ruler's weakness and sin. Ahaziah's reign was a brief episode of two years, for he died prematurely by a fall through the lattice of one of the palace windows, which had, perhaps, given way as he

¹ 2 Kings v. 3; vi. 32; xiii. 17.

² 2 Kings xiii. 14.

leaned on it. Joram, another son of Ahab, followed on the throne, and held it for twelve years; and under him, Elisha showed that he had inherited all the lofty independence of Elijah. Joram had put away the image of Baal, which Ahab had sanctioned, and would not allow his mother, Jezebel, who was still living, to restore it, but he retained the ox-worship of Bethel and Dan. He and Jehoshaphat, whose son married one of Joram's sisters, had gone to war with Moab, and Elisha had attended the army—in what capacity is not told. A difficulty having risen from the want of water, both kings waited on the prophet for instructions; but the humble prophet, grand in the consciousness of his high office, and in the scorn of one identified, at least by birth, with Ahab and Jezebel, disdained to speak with Joram, and told him to go to the prophets of his father and mother. Nor would he condescend to talk with him, even when humbly asked by the king to do so. Repeating the form of asseveration he had learned from Elijah, he only answered, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." A brave heart this, that feared the face of no living man!

The respect in which Elisha was held by the people, prevented any bad results from such stern puritan bluntness, and, besides, the aid rendered by the prophet to the army had shown his honest patriotism. But the campaign against Moab failed, and Benhadad was hence encouraged to make another determined invasion from Syria, to try to subdue Israel. Samaria itself was closely besieged. Elisha had come to live in the lower part of the town, and thither Joram often went from the upper city, where the palace stood, to consult him.

His fame spread even to the camp of the enemy, where it was currently believed that he revealed to the king of Israel even the words spoken by Benhadad in his sleeping chamber.¹ Elisha counselled firm resistance, and promised deliverance, but so far from the siege being raised, famine raged in Samaria, to such a degree that a woman was detected eating the flesh of her own child.

Shocked at a discovery so terrible, Joram burst into wild despairing fury against the prophet who had hindered him from yielding to the enemy, and sent a soldier to behead him at once. Elisha was deliberating with the elders of the city on the measures to be taken, when the messenger arrived. Admittance was refused him, and when the king himself came to see why his commands were not carried out, he was calmly told that the next day would see the city delivered, as, indeed, it was.

Such an incident, following all that had preceded, and added to the fact that Elisha had been the disciple and servant of Elijah, raised him still more in popular reverence, but his relations with Joram were henceforth broken off, after his life had been thus threatened. Nor did the king act as if he wished to stand well with him. Concessions were once more made to Jezebel in favour of her idols, and their worship was restored, apparently in its former splendour.

In such circumstances Elisha withdrew to Damascus. There, he found Benhadad seized with some illness, and was presently consulted by him as to the hope of his recovery. An officer of the court, by name Hazael, had already, long before, been secretly anointed by Elijah as king of Syria, and him the unsuspecting

¹ 2 Kings vi. 12.

Benhadad now sent to Elisha, with customary presents. The prophet read the heart of the messenger, and returned an ambiguous answer in keeping with the future he foresaw. Hazael was determined that the king should die, if not of this sickness, then by violence. "Benhadad's sickness," said Elisha, "was not mortal, yet he should die." In saying so the tears fell from his eyes, at the thought of the misery Hazael would bring on Israel.

The catastrophe was not long delayed. Hazael, the next day, took a thick cloth, dipped it in water, spread it on Benhadad's face as he lay in his bath, and suffocated him: then quietly ascended the throne in his stead!¹ His accession was the ruin of Joram, but the incidents connected with this will come more naturally in a sketch of the story of Jehu.

When Joram had perished, Elisha was sorely tried by his successor, the fierce champion of Jehovah-worship, through his reign of twenty-eight years, for the worship of the ox-symbols of Bethel and Dan was still retained. The apparent necessity of preventing the people from going to Jerusalem proved so strong, that the policy of Jeroboam was perpetuated by the new dynasty, as it had been by those before it. The moral corruption of Israel was, in fact, deeply seated, and the worship of Jehovah had lost its hold on the mass, else such a state of things could not have been maintained. The spirit of Elisha must have grieved day by day at the disappointment of his hopes, alike as a patriot and a prophet. Not only had he failed to bring about a restoration of the ancient faith: he had the sorrow of witnessing the first steps towards the political destruction of the kingdom, for, in Jehu's

¹ 2 Kings viii. 15.

reign, Hazael, true to Elisha's predictions, wrested the splendid territory of Bashan and Gilead, beyond the Jordan, from Israel. The tribes of Reuben and Manasseh were thus separated from their brethren and united to a heathen monarchy, nearly a century and a half before the rest of their brethren were carried off to Assyria.

The reign of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, followed, with a temporary deliverance of the territory east of the Jordan, but no abiding recovery of the former glory of Israel. Whatever success was at any time gained must have been speedily lost, for we are told that Syria left the king only a body-guard of fifty horsemen, a state equipage of ten chariots, and a nominal army of ten thousand men. "The king of Syria," says the inspired chronicle, "had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing." Nor was there any improvement in the religious bearing of the nation, for not only were the ox-symbols of Jehovah retained, but the "grove" and the worship of Baal still flourished in Samaria.

Elisha's life was fast drawing to a close when the seventeen years of the reign of Jehoahaz ended, and his son Joash ascended the throne. For sixty years the now hoary-headed man of God had been witnessing for Jehovah among the people, but while they had honoured him with outward respect, they had turned a deaf ear to his entreaties to return to the faith of ancient days. He had wrought miracles, and taught in their streets, but their hearts were set in them to do evil, and neither the fiery zeal of Elijah nor the more gentle and tender spirit of his successor availed to save them.

We catch a last glimpse of the prophet in the opening

years of the reign of Joash. He had fallen sick of his last illness, and word ran through the city that he was about to die. All classes had long revered him, and even in the palace his venerable dignity was held in profound respect. The king himself, to testify the reverence due to one so blameless in character, and linked so closely with the distant past and its great prophet-hero, Elijah, came down to the lower town where he resided, to see him once more. About sixty years had passed since the dying man had stood beside Jordan, and, as Elijah was taken from him, had cried out in the bitterness of his sorrow, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,"—as if he felt that he whom he was losing was the true defence and glory of the land—worth more than a royal host, in the strength his presence lent it. Perhaps the words were a familiar expression of supreme honour, for now Joash used them again of Elisha. "He, not the forces of cavalry and footmen," sobbed the king, "was the true bulwark of the kingdom, had he only been duly heeded!" The blessing was brightening when about to take its flight.

That the high praise was just, was to be shown even from a bed of mortal sickness. "Open the window, eastward," said the dying seer; and on the king forthwith doing so, the command to shoot was added. As the arrow sped, the voice of the prophet was heard saying, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek till thou hast consumed them."

But the promised victory was shorn of its full results by a listlessness which proved still more vividly how much more the kingdom depended on the prophet than on its ruler. "Take the arrows and smite the ground,"

said Elisha once more. Had Joash been a man of energy or soul, he would have expended his quiver in doing so, after the intimation he had heard of triumph over the deadly enemies of his throne being symbolised by a similar act. He was content, however, to shoot three arrows, and then desisted, and thus won only a partial victory instead of finally crushing his foe.

Our limits forbid detailed enumeration of the private incidents, as they may be called, of Elisha's life. Strange to say, his fame has in great measure faded before the grander figure of his precursor and master, Elijah, but the significant fact remains that a larger space is accorded him in the sacred narrative than is granted any other prophet.



BAAL-WORSHIP (FROM A BABYLONIAN CYLINDER).

A barndoor-fowl, on the right side of the illustration, is the earliest notice of this familiar bird.



NAAMAN, THE SYRIAN.¹

THE rise and fall of States is sudden or more slow as an age is more barbarous or civilized. In rude, unsettled times a skilful leader throws down the boundaries of kingdoms in a single campaign and erects an empire in their place. Charlemagne extended his sway from the Atlantic to Bohemia, and from the Ebro and Calabria to the German Ocean and the Baltic. The Arabs in seventy years subdued the whole north of Africa, from Egypt to Morocco, and nearly all Spain. This century, indeed, has seen the French empire stretch from the Atlantic to the Vistula, and from Sicily to the Baltic, but it was the passing phenomenon of a wild political enthusiasm, and passed away like a sudden tempest, leaving the ancient landmarks much as it found them.

In the East, even till recent times, the political divisions of mankind depended in each generation on the fortune of some conqueror. The single reign of David saw the Jewish kingdom expand from the petty centre it had originally held, to the borders of Egypt and the Gulf of Akaba on the south, and to the valley

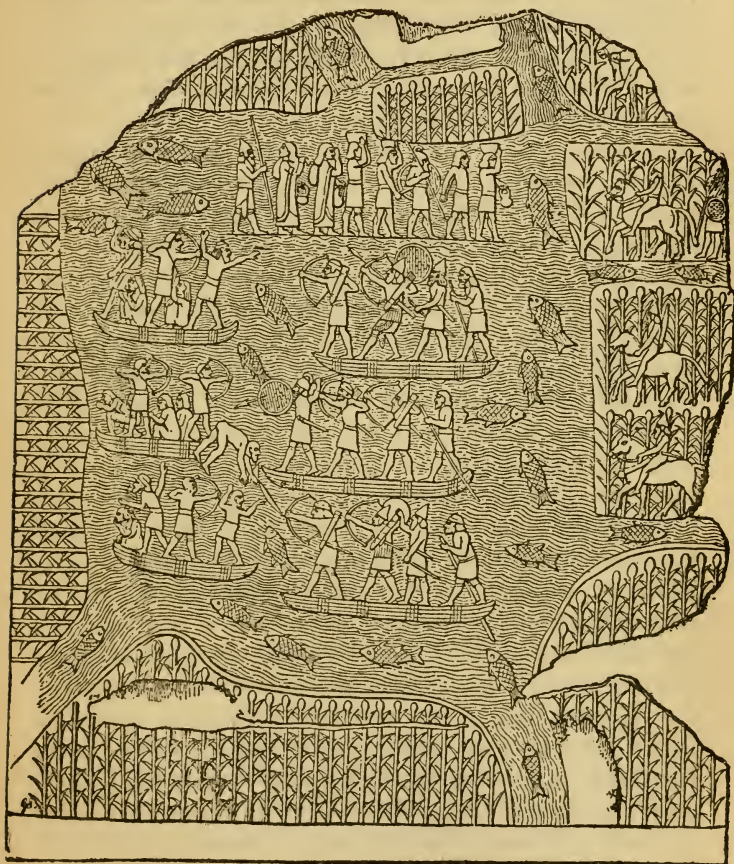
¹ The people called Kharu on the Egyptian monuments are the Syrians. They are represented with ear-rings of a peculiar shape, and they wear crosses round their necks.

of the Orontes and the line of the Euphrates on the north and north-east. But it fell in the next generation, on the breaking up of the monarchy under Rehoboam. Western Asia again consisted of a number of small principalities, constantly fighting with each other, and inviting the first invader by their weakness.

The ancient Assyrian monarchy had been for a time enfeebled, we hardly know by what causes, during the reigns of David and Solomon, and thus the way had been opened for the conquests of the former. But they had always been insecure, for, even in Solomon's time, a military adventurer—Rezon—was able to set up an independent Syrian kingdom, with Damascus for capital. This kingdom had become so powerful in the generation after Jeroboam's secession that King Asa of Judah was fain to call in its aid against Baasha, the founder of the second Israelitish dynasty, and was saved from further molestation for the time by its help. The king of Syria who rendered this useful service was Benhadad I.—“The Sun-worshipper”—grandson of the Rezon of David and Solomon's time. Under him, in the days of Omri, Israel suffered greatly, not only losing territory on the north, but being forced to allow a Syrian envoy to live in Samaria, as a token of subjection. Syria was now a strong empire, barring the way of Assyria towards the west, and even threatening the Euphrates.

Benhadad II. found himself face to face with this dangerous enemy. Shalmaneser II. was then the Assyrian king, and was as warlike as his predecessors. Syria could hold its own with Israel, but the balance was more even between it and the ruler of Nineveh. The Book of Kings informs us of Benhadad's wars with Ahab, in which, though thrice defeated, twice in the field, and once after the unsuccessful siege of Samaria,

he was yet able to resist Israel at Ramoth-Gilead, and to hold the district beyond the Jordan.



ASSYRIANS FORCING THE PASSAGE OF A RIVER: Kouyunjik.

Singularly enough, the Assyrian tablets recovered from the ruins of Nineveh, record different campaigns

of Shalmaneser against this Benhadad. The Syrian league included many States, and had for its object resistance to Assyria. But Shalmaneser was determined to annex the territories of the league to his empire if possible, and the details he has left in relation to his efforts to do so throw great light on the condition and resources of his opponents.

He relates that on his first invasion he found himself opposed by a force under Benhadad, consisting of 1200 chariots, 1200 "carriages," and 20,000 infantry—the contingent of Benhadad himself; by 700 chariots, 700 carriages, and 10,000 infantry of Hamath, in Lebanon; 2000 chariots, and 10,000 infantry of Ahab of Israel; 500 infantry of the "Goim;" 1000 Egyptians; 10 chariots and 10,000 men of Irquanata; 200 men of Arvad; 200 of Usanata; 30 chariots and 10,000 men of Sizana; 1000 camels from Arabia, and a force from the king of the Ammonites. The battle was fiercely contested, so that, though nominally victorious, the Assyrians attempted nothing more that season. Four years later (B.C. 850), Shalmaneser invaded Syria again, but Benhadad and his allies, not waiting to be attacked, marched out against him, and seem this time to have been more decisively successful than before, for Shalmaneser ended his expedition abruptly. In the next year the attempt to conquer the Syrian league was renewed, but again it failed. Three years later an immense army was marched against Benhadad and his wide confederacy once more, but the invasion was still vain. The resistance was too brave and powerful. It was not till the reign of Hazael, Benhadad's murderer, in the days of Jehu, that the Syrian power was broken. Then, at last, Shalmaneser triumphed.

Naaman, to introduce whose story this sketch of Syrian history was necessary, was commander-in-chief

of Benhadad's army, and held, besides, the highest dignity in the state as the subject nearest the king. He stood in such special favour, we are told, "because by him Jehovah had given deliverance to Syria," doubtless by his successfully repelling the tremendous peril of the Assyrian invasions. He was a man of great bodily strength and of noble presence, and must have been envied for his glory and splendid fortune by the nation at large, and even by neighbouring people, for he was the Marlborough or Wellington of his age.

But, as in the case of one of the greatest Rajahs present at the state reception of the Prince of Wales at Delhi, Naaman's jewelled turban and robes, heavy with pearl and gold, could not hide the fact that he was a leper. Had he been a Jew this would have shut him out from society, but in Syria isolation was not thus enforced any more than in India now. Yet it was not the less terrible a calamity in the bodily suffering and the deep sense of humiliation it entailed.

Ahab had been dead some years: the short reign of his son Ahaziah had passed, and Joram, another of his sons, reigned over Israel. The failure of Ahab's campaign had brought a lull in the almost constant hostility between Syria and the Jewish kingdom, but forays were still made from time to time, perhaps on both sides, by the border populations, on each other's territory. In one of these, among other prisoners carried off as slaves by the Syrians, was a young Hebrew girl who had been bought as a slave to wait on Naaman's wife. Struck by the misery of the great man, her owner, she bethought herself, with the quick wit of her race, of the prophet Elisha, in Samaria, and told her mistress that she was sure he could effect a cure, and presently her words were carried to Benhadad.

Glad of any chance of serving one whom he held in such honour, the king instantly resolved that Naaman should try what the wonder-worker of whom he thus heard could do. An official letter to Joram was drawn up, requesting him to aid in the matter, and rich presents for the prophet, to secure his help, were provided—the gold and silver coin alone amounting to £12,000 of our money.

Thus prepared, Naaman set out for Samaria in his chariot, escorted by a body-guard of cavalry, and duly delivered his master's letter to Joram. Benhadad had written with a heathen's ignorance of the character, and perhaps even of the name of Elisha—knowing merely that it was said leprosy could be cured in Israel, but leaving it to the king of the land to take what steps were needed, by summoning the wonder-worker before him and requiring him to relieve Naaman. But Joram could only think of his relations to Syria, and saw a political meaning in the request. It seemed to him a mere pretext for a fresh quarrel, and the fear of this so alarmed him, as the letter was read in full divan before his ministers, that he rent his clothes in formal expression of his distress.

Meanwhile Elisha had heard of the great Syrian's arrival, of the letter he brought, and of Joram's perplexity, and hastened to relieve him by a message, requesting that the stranger should be sent to him, "that he might know there was a prophet in Israel." Naaman was at once told, and forthwith set off with his escort to Elisha's house, in the lower part of the city.

Ignorance of the ceremonial laws of the Jewish religion seemed now, however, likely to bring the visit to an impotent conclusion. Elisha, as a strict Jew, could not approach a leper, and therefore sent out a

messenger to Naaman with instructions. Accustomed to Oriental deference, the great man could neither understand nor brook such a fancied slight. Besides, Elisha's prescription seemed almost a mockery, for it only directed the leper to go down to the nearest Jordan ford and wash seven times in the waters. Haughty and quick-blooded, though open, as it soon proved, to reason, and readily yielding to a better mood, Naaman felt indignant, and loudly expressed his anger to his retinue. "I thought," said he, "that he would surely at least come out to me, and stand and call on the name of Jehovah, his God, and pass his hand over the place, and remove the leprosy. Instead of that he has only sent out a servant to me! As to bathing in Jordan, are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned his horses' heads and drove off in a rage.

Nor was he without apparent grounds for his anger. It seemed due to one in his position, who had come so far, on such an errand, to show him the slight respect of coming out to him; and, as to the Jordan, its troubled waters, in their sunken and useless course, with no town on their banks, as they rushed down their steep, inaccessible bed, could not compare with the streams of the glorious Damascus. Did not the Abana flow pure as crystal from the snowy Lebanon, through the very streets of the city, amidst wide gardens whose fame was spread through all lands? And did not the Pharpar flow by it from the steep sides of the mighty Hermon?

But if the master, for the time, lost his ordinary calmness, there were fortunately some round him who knew how to bring him to himself again, and who were

as sensible as faithful. They reminded him that the prophet had asked him to do only a very simple thing, and that if, as was assuredly the case, he would willingly have done far more had it been proposed, he should much less think of hesitating to comply with what only offended him from its simplicity. As easily calmed as he had been readily offended, Naaman's cavalcade was forthwith turned towards the chasm of the Jordan, twenty-five miles off in a straight line at its nearest point, but much farther in the distance to be travelled, from the winding of the ravines down which it must be reached. Once gained, there was no reluctance in precisely obeying the injunctions of the holy man, and the result showed their Divine source. Dipping himself seven times in the sacred stream, his flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Returning at once to Samaria, he drove forthwith to Elisha's house to express his gratitude, and to beg acceptance of some outward mark of it. No longer kept back by Naaman's uncleanness, the prophet instantly came out to meet him, but the honour of Jehovah seemed to forbid his accepting any reward, lest it should appear as if the cure were only on a footing with the mercenary charms and rites of the heathen priests, with whom Naaman was familiar at Damascus.

His amazing cure had wrought a great change in the Syrian's religious feelings. "I know, now," said he, "that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," and in his honest enthusiasm he determined that henceforth he would worship Him only. But, like all men of his age, he foresaw a difficulty, which he begged Elisha to aid him in overcoming. He fancied that Jehovah, like other gods he knew, was the local

divinity of Samaria, and that, as such, prayer could be worthily and with success offered to Him, only on the soil of Israel. Would Elisha, therefore, allow him to take back to Damascus two mules' burden of earth, that he might spread it out on a chosen and well-guarded spot, and thus be able to pray and present his offerings to Jehovah, as it were, on a part of His own land? for henceforth he would offer burnt-offering to Jehovah alone and would sacrifice to no other god.

One more word was added, the answer to which is full of divine instruction. He must needs, as part of his official duties, attend Benhadad when he went to the temple of his god Rimmon, and when the king bowed in worship he could not avoid bending also in outward form—"Jehovah pardon thy servant in this thing." He had his heart and his true homage, though circumstances demanded the formal and mere external act. The only answer Elisha gave was—"Go in peace!"

With this tender dismissal the great man and his retinue turned their horses' heads once more towards Damascus.





JEHU.

THE secession of Israel from the two southern tribes might very naturally have been expected to secure a large prosperity for those who had thus shaken off a yoke confessedly heavy, and were henceforth to govern themselves. The result, however, proved bitterly disappointing. The religious sentiment, which had given the nation as a whole its unity and inspiration, was rudely disturbed by the erection of new local centres of worship, and it was degraded by a dangerous approach to the idol-worship of the countries round. The inevitable decay of religious enthusiasm, and the growing approximation to heathen standards, rapidly corrupted the springs of national life, and as the strength of a people depends on the healthy tone of individual thought and action, the national vigour faded with the decline of puritanism.

Nor was this the only calamity. The throne of the new kingdom had been filled by the leader of the revolt from Judah, but no such halo of splendid associations surrounded him as appealed to the imagination in favour of the heirs of the House of David. The reverence and prestige which entrench a dynasty in its honours were wanting. One revolution had succeeded, and there was no reason why others should not be

equally successful. It is true of all movements that they are faithful to the spirit of their origin. The reign of Jeroboam had been merely that of an energetic conspirator, with no large views to draw towards his house the affections of his subjects. He had played with the national religion for political ends, and had raised a strong army to guard his power.

But the army thus trusted never forgot that Jeroboam was in reality its creature, and very soon tired of his family. Nadab, his son, fell a victim to a conspiracy in the forces at Gibbethon. The son of the new king, Baasha, was murdered by Zimri, an officer of the cavalry, and Omri, the general-in-chief, rose in his turn, and having slain all other competitors, seated himself on the throne. In less than fifty years there had been three dynasties.

The house of Omri maintained itself longer than its predecessors. Omri himself, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram, or Joram, had reigned in all forty-eight years, when another revolution, more sweeping than any former one, rooted out the third dynasty and raised up a fourth.

The reign of Joram had lasted for twelve years. They had been marked by a close and steady alliance with Judah, dating from the reign of Ahab, and strengthened by intermarriages between the two houses. War had been levied against Moab by the two kingdoms unitedly, in the earlier years, and at the close of his reign Joram's nephew, Ahaziah, king of Judah, was with him at the siege of Ramoth Gilead, and perished shortly after in his company.

Weak and vacillating like his father, Joram had favoured the worship of Jehovah and that of Baal alternately, and had by turns been on friendly and hostile

terms with Elisha. The distress caused by the siege of Samaria, it is likely, had led to the last fatal change in his policy. Furious at the prophet for making promises which remained so long unfulfilled and led to such widespread suffering as the citizens of Samaria had endured, he seems, doubtless under the prompting of his mother Jezebel, to have restored Baal worship in all its splendour shortly after the siege had been raised. His doing so was the immediate cause of his ruin.

A strong party in the State and in the army had gradually been won over to the old national faith, and to them this apostasy seemed to justify any measures for removing a dynasty so evidently hostile to the worship of Jehovah. As usual, the feeling came to a head in the army, still, as hitherto, the focus of all revolutions. It only wanted a leader, and one was found in Jehu.

The country east of Jordan, with its chief town, Ramoth Gilead—"The heights of Gilead"—had been wrested from Omri, father of Ahab, by Benhadad I. of Syria, but it was too fertile to be left permanently in an enemy's hand, without an attempt to regain it. At the close of his reign, Ahab, in alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, had availed himself of temporary freedom from Syrian invasion to besiege Ramoth, the key to the district ; but the attempt failed, after costing Ahab his life.

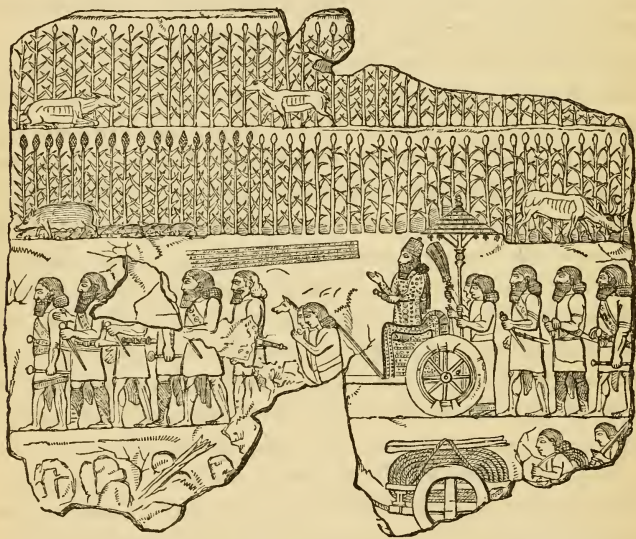
During his son Ahaziah's short reign nothing could be done ; but as soon as Joram had crushed the Moabite rebellion, he allied himself with his nephew Ahaziah, king of Judah, in the hope that their united forces would secure victory. Nor was he disappointed. The city was taken, and held by Israel, in spite of every effort of Hazael to drive them out. But it was as fatal to the

house of Omri as Gibbethon had proved to that of Jeroboam. Ahab had been mortally wounded at the former siege, and now Joram narrowly escaped the same fate, for he was hit by a Syrian arrow, and was thus forced to leave the army and return to Jezreel, leaving Jehu in charge of the town and the soldiery.

The moment now seemed to have come for a successful conspiracy; the moment for which Jehu had been long waiting. Many years before, Elijah had been commissioned by God to anoint him as future king, and doubtless did so, but no opportunity for a revolution had offered. He had been in the chariot with Ahab when Elijah appeared in the vineyard of Naboth, and he had heard the king's doom and that of his house. A master of dissimulation and reticence, he had feigned loyalty, and kept his own counsel so perfectly, that he retained the favour not only of Ahab, but of his sons, and had risen to the highest posts in their service. Troubled with no tincture of religious feeling, he yet had shrewdness enough to feign a zeal at the right moment for Jehovah, though he affected enthusiasm for Baal till that moment came. A fiery energy characterized him as a soldier, discovering itself even in his chariot-driving, which was always reckless to a proverb, and at times almost madly furious; but of the higher qualities of a general or politician he showed no trace.

The crisis of Jehu's long pondered conspiracy came suddenly at last. While still in Ramoth Gilead, at the head of the army, the confidential attendant of Elisha was sent hurriedly by the prophet to him, with the command to anoint him in the name of Jehovah, as king over Israel, for the special purpose of smiting down the reigning king and all connected with him, in fulfilment of the curse pronounced long before against the race of

Ahab. The messenger found Jehu sitting in counsel with his officers, and having called him apart, instantly fulfilled his message, and forthwith fled, to escape possible results. "What message did that crack-brained fellow bring you?" asked the company, when Jehu reappeared; "had he bad news or good?" "You know that man, don't you, and his errand?" replied Jehu. But on their saying they did not, he frankly told them.



PORTION OF A SLAB FROM NINEVEH, SHOWING AN ASSYRIAN CHARIOT.

Things proved ripe for the announcement. On the moment all rose, and stripping off their outer robes, cast them as an extemporized carpet of state for the new king, on the floor, at the head of the stairs of the house, which, as the highest place, served for a throne, on the steps of which they might do him homage. Then, as was done of old, in the case of Absalom, each

man who could find a trumpet seized it, and with shouts and long flourishes proclaimed Jehu king. They evidently reckoned on the acquiescence of the troops, and were not disappointed.

Decision and energy marked the first steps of the chief conspirator. Calling his chariot and a detachment of cavalry, he instantly set off at the utmost speed to Jezreel, a distance of sixty or seventy miles, by the nearest road; down the slope from Ramoth, nearly 3,000 feet above the sea; across the Jordan to where, long after, Archelais stood; then north to Bethshean, over the spurs of the hills of Ephraim; then up the Valley of Trembling, famous since Gideon's day, to the plain of Esdraelon, where Jezreel stood. No one was allowed to go to the king to put him on his guard, so that the first intimation he had of Jehu's approach was the cry of the warder on the palace tower, that a company of horse was approaching rapidly. A first and second messenger, sent out by the king to learn who they might be, rushing on thus strangely, were detained by Jehu. At last, concluding from the furious speed of the cavalcade that it must be a visit from his general, Joram, though still weak, ordered his chariot to be made ready to go out to learn the news, and asked his nephew, Ahaziah of Judah, to accompany him. He evidently fancied that something critical had happened at Ramoth, but he was soon undeceived. Jehu and he met, ominously, at the vineyard of Naboth. "What has happened?" asked Joram: "do you bring news of peace or war?" Treason had now no reason for longer concealment. "What peace," cried Jehu, "can there be, so long as the idolatrous whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many?"

"We are betrayed," said Joram, hurriedly to Ahaziah,

and forthwith turned his chariot to flee. But his hour had come, for an arrow from Jehu's bow pierced him through the next moment, and, as the words of Elijah had predicted, his body fell out, and lay in its blood in the garden of Naboth. Nor was Ahaziah more fortunate. As one of the race of Ahab, he too was included in Jehu's fierce proscription, and being overtaken at Megiddo, where he had hoped to cross the Carmel range, was put to death.

News of the revolution had by this time reached the palace at Jezreel, where the queen-mother, Jezebel, now an old woman, resided. True to itself, the haughty spirit that had virtually ruled the land so long, resolved to face the danger. Arrayed in her finest robes, she seated herself at a window, and sought to awe Jehu on his approach, by reminding him of the fall of Zimri, a conspirator like himself. "Throw her over the window," shouted Jehu to her attendants, "if you are on my side." The next moment her eunuchs had seized her and thrust her out of the open lattice. The hoofs of Jehu's horses and the wheels of his chariots completed the bloody work, and the unburied corpse was left where it lay, to be eaten by the town dogs before morning.

But the bloodthirsty soul of the new king was not yet slaked. A message was sent to Samaria with a challenge to set up one of the many sons of Ahab, and stand an attack in his defence, but he doubtless counted on all opposition being overawed by what had already happened. An answer of profound submission to their new master, who had already murdered two kings, was returned. "If it be so," replied Jehu to the messengers, "send me the heads of every one of the house of Ahab by this time to-morrow." Baskets containing the heads of seventy men of Joram's kin-

dred, brought to Jezreel within the specified time, attested the abjectness of their compliance.

Blood enough seemed to have been shed, but there was more to follow. The connections of Ahaziah, king of Judah, the nephew of Joram, ignorant as yet of what had happened, were on their way to salute their relatives, who had already perished. They, too, by Jehu's express orders, were taken alive, that he might have the pleasure of ordering their execution, which he presently did. They had the blood of the house of Ahab in their veins, and that was enough. Every one connected with it in any way was put to death.

An ally was needed to carry out the ulterior designs of the grim soldier. He was determined to play the part of a zealot for Jehovah, apparently from a shrewd conviction that it was the stronger side, as shown by the support of the army against Joram, the patron of Baal. Leaguering himself with an Arab chief, Jehonadab, the son of Recab, the two planned the utter extirpation of the idolatrous party. "Come," said Jehu, "and see my zeal for Jehovah." Meanwhile, to the people at large he affected undivided loyalty to Baal and his worship, and ordered the priests to proclaim a great gathering of all the adherents of the idol, he himself, as he announced, wishing to offer a great sacrifice to it. Messengers were sent through all Israel to summon every worshipper of Baal to the high festival, with instructions to come arrayed in the festal dress of the idol.

On the given day the courts of the huge Baal temple at Samaria were crowded with a vast multitude thus attracted. No one who worshipped Jehovah was allowed to enter. And now Jehu appearing at the high altar, offered the appropriate sacrifices, as if an enthusiastic votary. The excitement and rejoicing were no doubt

immense. But the mask was no longer needed. Soldiers had been set at every door to prevent any one escaping, and at the command of Jehu bands of swordsmen entered and massacred the whole great crowd in cold blood. The existence of two parties in the state had been the ruin of Joram; his successor was determined there should be only one. The huge idol of Baal, and



ASSYRIAN KINGS.

the images of other gods in the outer courts, were forthwith dragged from their places and destroyed, the temple thrown down, and its site given up to the most degrading uses.

With all this remorseless zeal there was no honest enthusiasm for the true God. "He took no heed," says the inspired record, "to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." He maintained the

ox-worship of Bethel and Dan, like all his predecessors, contenting himself with having exterminated the party identified with the dynasty he had overthrown.

As a ruler he showed little vigour or capability. Syria, still eager to crush Israel, had more success than it had achieved under Joram, for Hazael, the king of Damascus, was able to reconquer the district beyond the Jordan, which Joram had so bravely won.

Jehu's reign is noteworthy as the first in which the doom of the whole kingdom is foreshadowed by the advancing power of Assyria. Hazael's conquest of Gilead must have taken place early, for Shalmaneser II., king of Assyria, has recorded on the tablets and the obelisk of his reign found at Nineveh, that he defeated the Syrian king in the district of Lebanon, inflicting a loss of 160,000 men, 1,221 chariots, and 470 carriages, which fell into Shalmaneser's hands along with the camp of Hazael. Failing to take Damascus, the Assyrian then turned to Bashan and Gilead, formerly territory of Judah, but long held by the Syrians, and wasted them with fire and sword. Jehu, terrified by this new enemy, now submitted to pay tribute to him, and it is duly recorded that among the items of which it consisted were gold and silver; buckets, cups, and bottles of gold; lead, and rods of wood for maces.¹ It was the beginning of the end. The shadow of the new kingdom on the Euphrates was beginning to fall over Israel.

¹ See illustrations in *Hours with the Bible*, vol. iv. pp. 167, 168.





JONAH.

THE brief narrative of Jonah takes us back to a period so remote that it is difficult to realize its hoary antiquity. Born in Gath-hepher—"The wine-presses by the well"—a village not far from Nazareth; the son of an unknown man, whose name, however, is itself an honour, Amittai—"The truthful one"—he spent his day in the reign of Jeroboam II. of Israel—eight hundred years before the birth of Christ (825-774). When we remember that the first Olympiad dates from B.C. 776, and is the earliest sparkle of Grecian history, and that Rome was as yet a nameless village, if founded at all;¹ that the empire of Babylon was not to rise for a hundred and fifty years, and that Alexander the Great was not to be born till four hundred years later, it will help us to bear our thoughts back across the twenty-seven centuries that lie between us and the prophet. So venerable a book for its age alone, is the word of God!

The only incident of Jonah's life recorded outside the short book known by his name is mentioned in 2 Kings xiv. 25. Jeroboam the Second "restored the coast of Israel, from the entering of Hamath (in Lebanon) unto the sea of the plain (the Dead Sea), according to the

¹ B.C. 753 is the legendary year of the foundation of Rome.

word of Jehovah Elohim of Israel, which he spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher." It is clear, however, from this, that what we know of him was only a single episode in a life of active prophetic ministrations. His presence, meanwhile, in the ungodly and idolatrous kingdom of the Ten Tribes, proves touchingly how long God strove to win back His people, and how unwilling He was to leave them to their sins.

Nor was the loving pity of God shown only to Israel. Even in those ages when He revealed Himself as especially the God of a chosen people, He did not forget that other nations also were the children of His hand.

Assyria had reigned, under various dynasties, for centuries, over the regions on the Euphrates, and was within twenty years after Jeroboam's death to bring Israel itself into tribute to it. The greatness and wickedness of the mighty State was thus known over all the East, and in Palestine among other countries. Perhaps this, or possibly the future relations of Mesopotamia to His own people, led to a commission from God to Jonah which is unique in the history of the ancient economy.

The word of the Lord, we are told, came to Jonah, telling him to arise and go to Nineveh, and cry against it; "for its wickedness is come up before Me."

Traditions of the unrivalled size and magnificence of Nineveh have been current from the earliest ages; but the city had fallen so completely into decay before the period of authentic history that it is hard to know how far to trust what is recorded respecting it. It is said to have had walls a hundred feet high, broad enough for three chariots to drive abreast on them, and that it was defended by fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred

feet in height. It is further reported to have included in its vast intramural space no less a circuit than sixty miles. In the Book of Jonah it is described as "a great city to God," of "three days' journey," and as containing a hundred and twenty thousand persons who could not discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle. Yet this does not realize the modern idea of a mighty city in the grandest sense, for how vastly greater must the number of the young be in such a community as that of London? It seems as if the population of Nineveh, reckoning from those spoken of as the children under seven, which is still the mode in Persia, was not over 600,000 souls.

However this may be, He, in whose sight a single soul is precious, was graciously pleased to send a warning to the mighty Eastern capital. But though the Almighty had pity on the heathen, His mercy found no echo in the narrow sympathies of the Jew who was to be its mouthpiece. With the crude child-like ideas of the Divine Being peculiar to an age of the world which knew only of local gods,—ideas which led Jacob to wonder that he should have found God present at Bethel as well as at his father's tents at Beersheba,—Jonah "rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord;" and making his way to the seaport of Joppa, took ship in a Phenician vessel bound to Tarshish, on the Guadalquivir, in Spain—the great port for the silver mines of that country.

The miraculous incident that followed is well known, and needs no detailed mention. A storm having risen, the guilty conscience of Jonah, in keeping with the ideas of temporal Divine vengeance universal in antiquity, believed that he was the cause: that it was, in fact, the vengeance of the Almighty demanding his

death as the price of the safe voyage of the ship. He requested to be thrown overboard. But "the Lord," we are told, "had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah;" and by its means he was kept alive, and at last reached the dry land.

Once more in his own country, the message commanding him to go to Nineveh was repeated; and with humbled spirit, Jonah no longer thought of disobeying. Travelling north to the fords of the Euphrates, and then following its banks to the south-east, he at last reached the end of his journey.

There, as often happens, the novelty of the message produced an impression which it might have failed to produce in the country of the Ten Tribes. Passing through the streets of the great city in his strange prophet's hairy mantle,—for all Jewish prophets seem to have worn that special mark,—he repeated as his awful and ever-recurring burden, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No human enemy was near, nor was there any human danger. The destruction must come from above, and this appalled the Ninevites. They might laugh at man, but the heavens could crush them in a moment.

Wide popular excitement was the result, penetrating even the painted halls of the king, and leading him to lay aside his splendour, and seek to propitiate the Divine Being by robing himself in sackcloth, and sitting on the ground. All Nineveh followed his example, showing sincere humiliation, and their doing so saved their city.

One more strange episode of the prophet's story is given. From whatever reason, the mercy shown to Ninevah only roused his anger. Perhaps he grudged the heathen a share in the favour which he fancied the

monopoly of the Jew. In his discontent he wished himself dead. Going outside the huge walls of the city, he sat in the shadow of a booth he had made, watching what would become of Nineveh. Meanwhile a quick-springing gourd,¹ as we read, was made to grow over him in the night, and after giving him, for a day, a refreshing shade, to wither the next, leaving the hot sun to beat on him, till he moodily thought that "it was better to die than to live."

Then follows in the narrative a strange dialogue, which it is hard rightly to understand in all its circumstances. "And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

There ends the amazing recital!

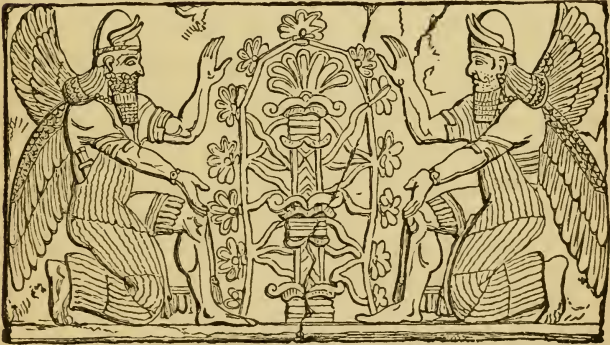
The lessons taught by this striking book are too numerous for our short limits. How touching to notice the contrast between the breadth of the charity of God and the petty narrowness of man! How touching to see that the Almighty cares even for the lives of the lower creatures; that even the cattle are thought of in the pity that looks on the great community!

"Jonah" teaches us, among other things, how God cares for other nations as well as those who outwardly seem specially in His favour: that He is not only the God of the Jew, but also of the heathen. It speaks of

¹ It is thought by some to have been the *palma christi*, or castor oil plant, which still grows to a great size in the Jordan Valley.

the lesson to such as Israel in the ready penitence of those they regarded as so much worse than themselves, and enforces a lesson of pity as well as the duty of missionary zeal.

The great truth sounds from it, moreover, that though God be ready to forgive, He is also stern to punish when repentance is withheld.



ASSYRIAN GENII KNEELING BEFORE THE TREE OF LIFE.



JEROBOAM II.

THE humiliation and weakness of the northern kingdom under Jehoahaz, the second of the line of Jehu, had led that king to seek help from Jehovah, the God of his fathers, and his repentance had been followed by a promise from the prophets still true to the ancient faith, that a saviour would arise to bring back the glory of his kingdom. Hazael and his son Benhadad, kings of Damascus, had been able not only to continue their oppression of Israel, but to annihilate its means of defence, so that it lay helpless at their feet.¹ Joash, the next king (B.C. 839–823), lived in a happy union with Elisha who died in his reign,² and thus showed that the godliness of his father's later days had been continued in himself; but although he laid the foundation of a future restoration of the kingdom from its prostration, it was still comparatively weak when he died. The death of Hazael of Syria, a fierce and able warrior, no doubt aided the efforts of Joash; the next king of Damascus, Benhadad III., proving himself much inferior in ability, alike in the camp and the council chamber, to his redoubted father.

At the accession of the son of Joash, Jeroboam II.,

¹ 2 Kings xiii. 3, 7, 22; Amos i. 3; iv. 10.

² 2 Kings xiii. 14.

things were thus in some measure brighter, but the neighbouring States were still haughty and threatening. It was left to the new king to win back for Israel a foremost place in Palestine, and to restore the glory of Israel wellnigh to that of which it had boasted in the great days of the empire of Solomon.

Jeroboam II. was the fourth king of the house of Jehu, and ascended the throne in the fifteenth year of Amaziah, king of Judah, who continued for fourteen years more his contemporary. Jeroboam, however, not only outlived him, but survived till the thirty-eighth year of the great Uzziah, king of Judah; his reign extending to the long period of at least fifty-one years, (B.C. 823-772),¹ Judah had been utterly crushed by Joash of Samaria when Amaziah foolishly attempted to conquer Israel; Jerusalem had been taken, and Jeroboam held the hostages given to his father by the southern king, as pledges of his future good behaviour. There was nothing therefore to weaken him in turning his arms against his foreign enemies. Little is told of his character or of his wars, but his conquests and the glory to which he raised his country mark him as the greatest of the kings of Samaria. The wide region from the valley of Hamath on the Orontes, far to the north, to the plain south of the Dead Sea, owned his sway. Moab and Ammon were finally subdued, and made tributary under native vassal-princes. The Valley of the Willows, on the border of Edom, became the southern boundary of Israel. The Ammonites had for generations harassed such portions of the territory of the tribes beyond the Jordan as were not in the hands of the Syrians, inflicting the most hideous barbarities on the population,² but the long pent up in-

¹ Klein on *Riehm*.

² Amos i. 13.

dignation at such savagery burst forth at length under such a leader as Jeroboam. Huge levies of the fighting men of Israel crossed the Jordan, and having taken Rabbah, the Ammonite capital, burnt its walls, fortresses and palaces, after a wild assault, amidst fierce shouting, and uproar like the tumult of the winds and skies in a day of whirlwind and tempest.¹ The king and his chief men were led off captives, and the land utterly humbled.

No less terrible was the fate meted out to Moab. The retreat of Israel from before Kir, its chief city, while Mesa was its king, had emboldened it to continue the refusal of tribute to Israel. Like Ammon, moreover, it had harried the Jewish territory, once and again, with circumstances of revolting cruelty. Now, at last, came the national revenge. An outrage committed by Moab on a king of Edom, whose bones they burned to dust, roused his people to aid in the attack, as allies to Jeroboam.² Terrible traditions of the struggle passed down to later times.³ Moab sank amidst tumult, shouting, and the sound of the trumpet.⁴ A voice of crying was heard from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. Wailing rent the air, over all the land. He was happy who escaped naked to the wilderness. The towns were made uninhabited desolations, from which Moab was scared as a bird from her nest. The cities went up in smoke and flame; their best men were slaughtered like sheep in the shambles. The fugitives fled, like doves, to the clefts of the rocks, or crouched together at the fords of the Arnon, till they could cross. Vast multitudes were slain, or dragged off to

¹ Amos i. 14.

² Amos ii. 1.

³ See the translation of Jer. xlviii. in *Hours with the Bible*, vol. vi. p. 154.

⁴ Amos ii. 2.

slavery; the very vines, cornfields and pastures were destroyed.¹

The formidable though undesigned aid of Assyria, strange to say, helped Jeroboam in his conquests. Binnirari, the second Sultan of Nineveh after the great conqueror Shalmaneser II., ascended the throne in the thirteenth year of the Israelitish king's reign, and proved a fierce enemy to Damascus. "I marched," says he, "against the country of the Khatti (Hittites) and took their king, Mariha, in his capital, Damascus. Profound fear of Assur, my lord, seized him. He embraced my knees, and made submission. I imposed on him a tribute of 2,300 talents of silver, 10 talents of gold, 3,000 talents of copper, 4,000 talents of iron, and of a quantity of woollen and cotton cloths and fabrics. I took the standard and



ASSYRIAN STANDARD WITH THE FORM OF ASSUR.

the royal umbrella, with all the vast wealth of his treasures—all, in fact, that was in Damascus, both in the city itself and in the palace." He boasts, moreover, of having laid under tribute and re-united to his empire, Phenicia, including Tyre and Sidon, the land of Omri, that is, the land of Israel, the land of Edom, and the whole of Palestine on the south, to the Western Ocean.² But though Jeroboam had thus, like the other

¹ Jer. xlviii. *passim*. ² Menant, p. 127; Keilinschriften, p. 113.

powers of Canaan, to acknowledge the supremacy of Nineveh and pay a yearly sum to its ruler, he was otherwise independent, and the utter humiliation of Damascus freed him from what had been hitherto the greatest danger to his throne.

While Damascus on the north-east was thus virtually destroyed by the attacks of Assyria, Phenicia on the west was disturbed by internal feuds. Civil wars,

which in the end led to the flight of Queen Elisa, afterwards the famous Dido, to the distant colony of her race in North Africa, and to the founding of Carthage, had broken the power of Tyre, now, as we have seen, like Samaria, tributary to Nineveh, and had freed Jeroboam from any fear on that side. Nor were things less favourable in the south. Uzziah, king



THE COTTON PLANT—*Gossypium religiosum*.

of Judah after Amaziah, lived at peace with the House of Jehu, while avoiding any entangling alliances like those of Jehoshaphat. Intercourse between Jerusalem and Samaria was free and constant, so that commerce and personal intimacies linked the two kingdoms together in friendship.

The political and religious maxims of Jeroboam's government were substantially those of his dynasty.

The worship of Jehovah remained the religion of the State, but in the impure form of His representation under the symbol of a sacred calf. Bethel, the Canterbury of the northern kingdom, had its grand temple with a royal palace adjoining, its multitudes of priests, and its splendid ritual. Dan, in the north, supplied the local wants as a shrine, while Gilgal, in Ephraim, rose to be a powerful rival to both. The half reformation of Jehu had been an utter failure, so far as the restoration of the ancient faith or the improvement of public morality were concerned. Idolatry of every kind thrived on all sides, and the foul worship associated with it sapped the character of the nation. Even the worship of Baal, so fiercely rooted out by Jehu, again raised its head.¹ The glory of Jeroboam's reign was only superficial. The moral decay of the land deepened each day.

Such a state of things brought about an entire change in the feelings of the prophets towards the house of Jehu. At first its champions, they became ultimately its fierce opponents. The calf worship of Bethel, always denounced in Judah, was inveighed against, on the spot, by Amos, a man of the southern kingdom. Jonah, who flourished in Israel in the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, before his religious policy had shown its worst characteristics, had been on the side of the great king, and saw in him the saviour of his country. But Hosea, who lived towards the close of the reign, was as stern as Amos had been in his denunciation of the prevailing evil.² Nor could any

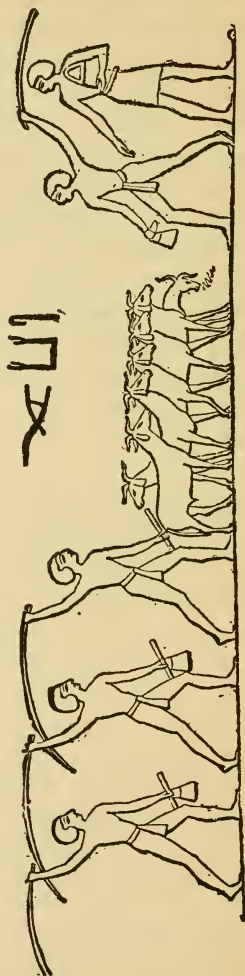
¹ Amos ii. 8; iv. 4; v. 5; viii. 14; 2 Kings xiv. 24; Hos. ii. 13, 17.

² 1 Kings xiii. 1 ff.; 2 Kings xiv. 25; Amos vii. 7-15; Hos. i.-iii.

warnings or threats of coming judgment be too strong.



PLOUGHING AND SOWING.—Wilkinson.



THE SEED TRAMPLED INTO A FIELD BY GOATS.—Wilkinson.

At the death of Jeroboam the inner corruption of the

kingdom led to its swift ruin, when the influence of the strong man who till then ruled had passed away.



PLOUGHING AND BREAKING THE CLODS.



GATHERING OF MILLET AND STRIPPING THE EARS.

Under the reign of Jeroboam the material prosperity of the kingdom rose to a height never previously known.

Samaria grew rich from the spoil of war and the profits of trade. Mansions of hewn stone rose on every side; the inner walls, in many cases, in imitation of Ahab's palace, covered with plates of ivory brought from Africa by the Phenicians.¹ The chambers were fitted up with couches and furniture of the same rare material.² Cool houses for the hot season; others, warmer, for winter, became the fashion. Pleasant vineyards attached to them covered the slopes of the hills.³ The sunny, heights and the rich plains of the land, east and west



A BLACK AND WHITE SLAVE ATTENDING AN EGYPTIAN LADY.

of the Jordan were covered with waving corn; the sower and the reaper were everywhere seen in their season. The rich of both sexes revelled in luxury; the multitude were poor, or in want. While the wealth of a few accumulated, the mass of the people sank daily. Men no longer owned the land they tilled, but had to toil for a wretched pittance as virtual slaves.

Above all, as has been said, the religious strength of the land was gone. Besides Bethel, Dan and Gilgal, Samaria boasted its idol shrines. A temple to Asherah

¹ 2 Kings vi. 4.

² Amos iii. 15.

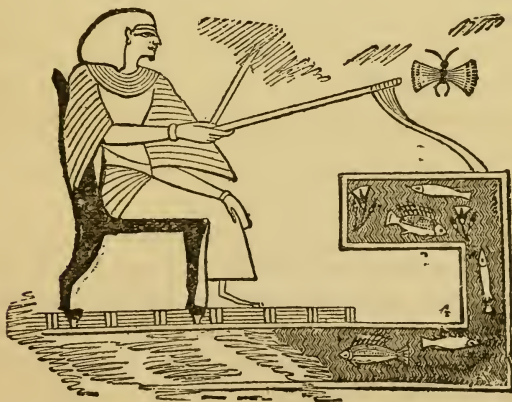
³ 2 Kings v. 11.

had remained standing from Jehu's day, in the capital, and was now re-opened. Women once more burned incense before its impure symbols, and decked themselves with earrings and jewels on feast days.¹ Images of Baal, of silver and gold, were set up by private persons.² The smoke of idol sacrifices rose from the tops of the hills, and worship was offered in idolatrous groves. The obscenities of heathenism once more polluted the land. Maidens and matrons forgot their honour, and stooped to be harlots in the idol temples.³ The glory of Jeroboam's reign was only phosphorescence on decay.

¹ Hos. ii. 13.

² Hos. ii. 8.

³ Hos. iv. 13-15.



EGYPTIAN NOBLE FISHING IN HIS POND.



ISAIAH.

IN Isaiah we have the grandest genius of the Hebrew race whose name and writings have come down to our day. Apart from his supreme dignity as an inspired oracle of Jehovah, there attaches to him the lofty honour of having been one of the great minds of the race.

The name of Isaiah's father, who is otherwise unknown, is said to have been Amotz—"the strong one." He has been confounded by some with the prophet Amos, but the names are differently spelt in Hebrew, and the mistake arose only from ignorance of that language. It would appear as if the fame of the prophet had led in after generations to the adoption of his name in many families, for we find it occurring no fewer than six times in the later sacred books.¹

Isaiah began his public appearances as a prophet in the last year of King Uzziah, 757 B.C.,² and thus he belongs to the circle of the oldest prophets whose writings have been preserved. Others had preceded him, for there had been prophets from the earliest ages. Even in Genesis,³ Abimelech of Gerar is told that Abraham is a prophet; and the word occurs more than once

¹ 1 Chron. iii. 21; xxv. 3, 15; xxvi. 25; Ezra viii. 7, 19.

² This date is uncertain. Schrader speaks of Uzziah as certainly alive in B.C. 740.

³ Gen. xx. 7.

in the discourses of Moses.¹ In the dark times of the Judges prophets were in full activity ;² and we are told that the prophet Gad, the official "seer of David," wrote a book of the Acts of his illustrious master, which has perished.³ Thus, the order had been a recognised institution in Israel for many hundred years before the rise of the earliest of its members whose utterances have been handed down to us.

Among the few personal details respecting Isaiah we learn that he was a citizen of Jerusalem, living apparently in the outer or lower town;⁴ that he was married, and had at least two sons. It is a striking evidence of his intense devotion to his office as prophet, that even his domestic relations are connected with it. His wife is spoken of as "the prophetess,"⁵ and his sons bear symbolic names. Thus, though he wore the hairy mantle of the prophet,⁶ he was no monk, or ascetic ; did not withdraw himself from the public life of his people, but took the liveliest interest and a foremost part in all the events of the day, in so far as they bore on the spiritual welfare of the land, though his ordinary life was doubtless spent as a faithful religious teacher in more obscure services and ministrations.

The kingdom of Judah was rich and flourishing in the reign of Jotham (B.C. 756-740), which followed the fifty-one years' reign of his father, Uzziah. If, as has been thought, Chapters II. to V. of his prophecies belong to Jotham's lifetime, Isaiah was an earnest preacher in that prince's reign ; striving to reform the morals of the

¹ Deut. xiii. 1; xviii. 15.

² Judges vi. 8.

³ 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

⁴ 2 Kings xx. 4. The word "court" should be translated "city."

⁵ Isa. viii. 3.

⁶ Isa. xx. 2.

nation and its leaders, and to procure the removal of what still remained of idolatry, after Uzziah's days. It is not improbable, however, that these chapters belong rather to the reign of Ahaz, and in that case the reign of Jotham is not marked by any of the utterances of the great prophet preserved to us. The quiet and political inactivity of the times appear to have left him free to pursue his career of usefulness in ways not less earnest but less prominent than those of his later life.

It was very different under the reign of Jotham's successor, the boy-king, Ahaz, who reigned from B.C. 740 to 724. The youth, weakness, irreligious spirit, and liking for heathenism of the new ruler, called forth Isaiah's appeals and remonstrances with a touching earnestness. The first years of the reign were disturbed by an invasion of Israel, with its ally, the king of Syria, and Ahaz and the people saw no hope of deliverance except by the aid of Assyria. In vain Isaiah warned king and nation alike against their folly: in vain he exhorted them to trust in God, their King, alone: in vain he foretold that the invasion would come to nothing. The popular excitement was too great to listen to such counsels and assurances, and Ahaz procured the humiliation of his enemies by the king of Assyria, at the price of a heavy "gift" and the yoke of a permanent tribute.

During the rule of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, who reigned from B.C. 724 to 695, Isaiah's influence was much greater. He was now under a religious prince, faithful to the principles of the theocracy which he administered, though of narrow political insight, and apparently under the influence of a strong faction in the state, which from this time exercised great power. This party was determined to free their country from the

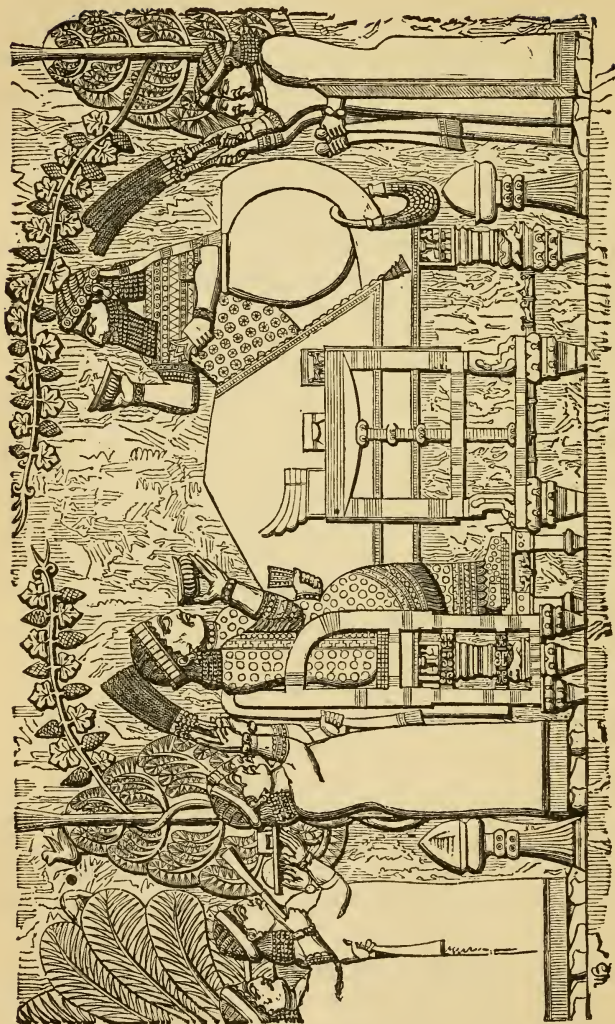
yoke of Assyria, and for that purpose formed an alliance with Egypt and Ethiopia, by whose help they expected to effect their end. This aid was the more readily counted upon, as Sargon, the reigning king of Assyria, was not on friendly relations with these two countries.

Isaiah at once set himself to oppose this new policy, and attacked it again and again with splendid eloquence and intense earnestness; warned his fellow-citizens of the faithlessness of the Pharaohs; threatened them with Assyrian invasions; and predicted the destruction of those who would wickedly force such a course on Hezekiah.

The opponents of the prophet were, nevertheless, successful in persuading or coercing the king to their wishes. The Assyrian tribute was left unpaid, and for a time all seemed to do well. But ere long an Assyrian army approached Jerusalem, and it appeared as if final ruin were to overtake the state. The tablets found in Nineveh record the events of the campaign. The king then reigning in Assyria was Sennacherib, and the year he came up against Judah was B.C. 702. Crossing from Nineveh to Syria he first attacked Sidon, but its prince, not feeling ready to oppose such a host, sailed away to Cyprus, leaving his city to the mercy of the invaders.

Sennacherib now besieged and took the various Phœnician towns, Tyre alone succeeding in resisting him. The greater and lesser Sidon; Zarephath, where the widow, Elijah's hostess, had lived; Hosah, Achzib, and Acre, in turn yielded to him. The sea-coast, down to the land of the Philistines, was now in the hands of the Assyrians.

Meanwhile his conquests, and the failure of Egyptian aid, brought nearly the whole of Palestine to the feet of Sennacherib, and the various rulers sent envoys, with



ASSURBANIPAL, THE GRANDSON OF SENNACHERIB, BANQUETING WITH HIS WIFE.

On the slab in the British Museum, the head of the Elamite monarch hangs on a tree in sight of the Great King.

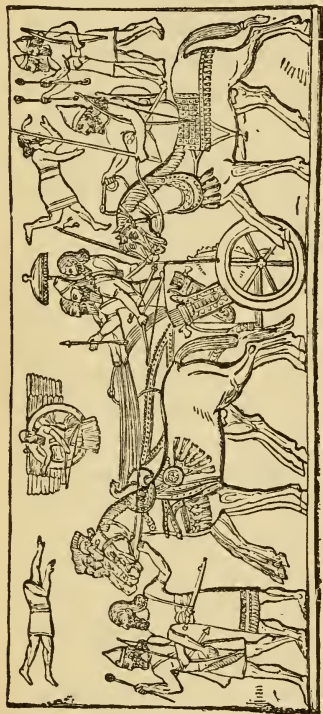
tribute and tokens of submission, to lay before him. Menahem, king of Israel, sent from Samaria; and so did the kings of Sidon, Arvad, Zebal, Ashdod, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and of Edom, from their respective capitals. Askelon, Ekron, and Judah alone remained in rebellion.

Presently Askelon was invaded; its king and his family captured and sent into exile; its cities humbled, and a new king set on the throne. Ekron was next attacked. Padi, its king, the Nineveh tablets inform us, had been faithful to Assyria; but his princes, priests, and people having conspired against and seized him, he was delivered to Hezekiah to be kept prisoner at Jerusalem. Like Judah, Ekron relied on Egypt, and now a force from that country and Ethiopia came to their aid, but they were ere long defeated. Ekron, soon after, fell: its chief men were put to death, and its people severely treated. Padi, the king, was demanded from Hezekiah, and, being delivered up, was reinstated on the throne.

The king of Judah, the chief tributary who had thrown off the yoke of Assyria, was attacked last. After crushing Ekron, Sennacherib marched against Judah, captured forty-six fortified towns, destroyed every open village, and carried into captivity 200,150 people of all sorts, together with horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep in great numbers.

The tablets go on to relate how Hezekiah was now shut up in Jerusalem like a caged bird, and how towers were built all round the city to attack it. Thus invested, the king and leading men were in dismay, and resolved on submission. How Isaiah protested against their purpose, we learn from the Book of Kings. Meanwhile, the Assyrians attacked Lachish, one of the

last remaining fortified towns of Judah. The pavilion of the proudest of their kings was pitched within sight of it, and the monarch, like Xerxes at Salamis, took his seat on a magnificent throne, to witness the final victory of his soldiers. Lachish fell before their assault,



TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION OF THE ASSYRIAN KING (NIMRUD).

and from thence Sennacherib sent the embassy mentioned in the Book of Kings, to dictate terms to Hezekiah. According to the Nineveh tablets the Jewish king made submission and gave tribute, which included thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones of various sorts, couches and thrones of ivory, skins and horns of buffaloes, girls and eunuchs, male and female musicians.

It was not customary for Assyrian kings to own disasters, and not a word is spoken of any reverse having happened to Sennacherib; but the

Bible, which is confirmed by a story told to Herodotus by the Egyptian priests, relates that "the angel of the Lord" went through the camp of the Assyrians, and destroyed 185,000 men, and that the Great King returned in disgrace to Nineveh.

Such a result must have greatly strengthened the hands of Isaiah, and must no less have weakened those of his opponents. His influence was no doubt increased by an incident that followed soon after. Hezekiah was struck with a sore disease. It seems to have been a form of the plague, in which boils manifest themselves at the crisis of the malady. To deepen the sadness of the king, Isaiah appeared at the palace with the message from God that the sickness would be fatal. But earnest prayer obtained a respite, and a second visit of the prophet announced that the Divine pity had heard him, and had lengthened his life fifteen years.

Hezekiah, though thus delivered from death, was still, however, at times, weak and unwise as before, and one illustration of this brings into notice Isaiah's lively interest in passing events, and the shrewd practical sense with which he regarded them.

Merodach Baladan, the king of Babylon, having resolved to win back from Assyria his native provinces, had sent an embassy to Hezekiah, with a present, affecting as his object a visit of sympathy for the king's recent illness, and congratulation at his recovery. His real object, beyond question, was to spy the condition of the kingdom; but Hezekiah's vanity was so flattered by the courtesy, that he let himself be thrown entirely off his guard. Taking the envoys into his confidence, he showed them the whole resources of his kingdom; his silver, gold, jewels, and all other treasures. Nothing could have been more unwise, and this Isaiah felt keenly. Coming to the king, he showed a prophet's boldness by asking who these men were to whom he had laid bare the secrets of the palace; and, on being told, announced that such weakness would have for its bitter result the excitement of the greed of Babylon,

and the ultimate destruction of Judah by it. Fearless and wise, he did not shrink from rebuking even an absolute monarch when he had to do so in the name of his God.

We have no further mention of Isaiah in any public action, after this fourteenth year of Hezekiah, so that some have thought he must have died before Manasseh's accession. But the fact that he wrote a biography of Hezekiah¹ seems to imply that he outlived him. The nineteenth chapter of his prophecies, moreover, has been by some fancied to date from the second year of Manasseh's reign, but this is only, at best, a probable conjecture.

The death of the great prophet has been made the theme of widespread tradition. It is said that he perished by violence, as one of the many martyrs of the early years of the reign of Hezekiah's ungodly son. The Jewish form of the legend is as follows:—

“Rabba says, Manasseh condemned him and put him to death, saying, Moses, thy Lord, said, No one can see God and live; but thou hast said, I saw the Lord on a throne, high and lifted up: Moses, thy Lord, said, Who has the Lord so near (as we), as often as we call on Him? but thou hast said, Seek ye Jehovah while He may be found: Moses, thy Lord, said, The number of thy days will I fulfil; but thou hast said, I will add to thy days yet fifteen years. Then said Isaiah, I know it of him (Manasseh) that he will not receive what I may say to turn him from his pride! He then called on his God, and was tied to a log of cedar, and this they forthwith raised and sawed through with a saw. And when the saw reached the prophet's mouth he gave up the ghost.”

¹ 2 Chron. xxxii. 32.

I have translated the expression used of the cedar as equivalent to their tying him to it, but the legend in some of its forms is not contented with so simple a rendering. We are told that when he fled from the wrath of Manasseh, a withered tree opened and received him into its midst, and that workmen were then set to saw the tree up, and thus murdered the prophet. The horrible punishment of sawing men alive was certainly in use among the Jews, for some of the people of Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, are said to have been sawn asunder by Joab or David;¹ and it was also a Persian custom to treat prisoners of war thus inhumanly. But in the case of Isaiah nothing is known, except that, in all probability, he was really put to death by Manasseh.

The character and genius of Isaiah are grandly shown in the book which bears his name. His fearless soul never ceased to denounce the special sins of the day—the idolatry, superstition, want of faith in Jehovah, contempt of the Law, and daring mockery of religion. Thorough reform was demanded, and a strict observance of the Law of God, but this not in mere outward form, which, without the heart, is treated as worthless. As a preacher of morals, Isaiah did not confine himself to condemning the prevalent sins of drunkenness, oppression of the poor, and perversion of justice, hardheartedness and shedding of blood, but held up to scorn and contempt the luxury and pride of the rich, their grasping after property, their confidence in abiding national prosperity, and the levity with which they received Divine chastisement. It must have been a strange spectacle to see a defenceless man thus attacking directly and fiercely all the corruptions of the day,

¹ 2 Sam. xii. 31.

foretelling the destruction of the proud and haughty, and demanding humility, confession of weakness, and lowly submission to the judgments of God. There is no vagueness, no attempt at soft words. The misfortunes of the times are the visitations for national sin. The haughtiest transgressors are as little spared as the humblest. The most overwhelming directness brings the sin home to the individual offender. We know how such a preacher would be regarded in our own day: how he would be denounced as ill-mannered, personal, interfering with what did not concern him, puritanical, and every way hateful to those whose true character he so bitterly exposed; nor can we wonder that one who acted thus was treated as he was, since the life of so faithful a witness for God would, even now, be far enough from enviable. What a contrast between the nobly honest and outspoken Hebrew preacher and the hollow smoothness of the modern pulpit. Isaiah and his order openly declared themselves against the devil and all his works. To-day the great thing is to let him lie quiet, and by no means tread on his outspread limbs. It would not pay, for this world, to do so.

But it is in his grand Messianic hopes that Isaiah rises to his loftiest flights. Some chapters read as if they had been written after the days of Christ, not centuries before them, and are justly spoken of as almost a fifth gospel.





JOSIAH.

BETWEEN Rehoboam, the first king of Judah, and Josiah, there lies an interval of nearly three hundred and fifty years, during which, with brief periods of prosperity, the kingdom had been sinking both morally and materially.

Manasseh, the son of the good Hezekiah, and grandfather of Josiah, had in the earlier part of his reign done much to bring the land to ruin. A heathen party had gained a strong hold in Jerusalem, and had succeeded in winning over the king to its side. His first years, indeed, must have been less a personal reign than a regency, for he was but twelve when he succeeded to the throne, but he followed only too blindly the policy of the heathen party when he attained his majority. Jerusalem and the country round saw the high places restored which Hezekiah had destroyed; altars to Baal rose, with the foul "groves" connected with his worship, and open idolatry of the heavenly bodies was practised by the Court. Nor was this all. Even in the Temple, altars were built to the sun, moon, and stars, and the king offered one of his sons as a burnt sacrifice to Moloch. Every abomination of heathenism flourished, and fierce persecution carried

terror and death among the worshippers of Jehovah. Yet the gods of the heathen were found a vain reliance in the day of trouble, though it had been hoped they would secure the safety of the country, if only by propitiating the neighbouring populations. An invasion from Assyria ended by Manasseh being carried off captive to Babylon,¹ where his calamities brought him to a better mind. Allowed to return to Jerusalem, he closed his long reign of fifty-five years more worthily than he had begun it, but the evil he had done left its deep traces in the future of the nation.

Amon, his son, a youth of twenty-two, succeeded; only, however, to perish by a conspiracy within two years. But in spite of his having favoured idolatry, the conservative feeling of the people refused to listen to any overtures of revolution, and the conspirators having been put to death, Josiah, the son of the murdered king, though only eight years of age, was proclaimed his successor.

The position of affairs was, in some respects, favourable at the beginning of the new reign. The power of Assyria had greatly decayed: the worshippers of Jehovah were for the time in the ascendant, and the very calamities of the past had prepared the public mind for a return to better ways. The blood of the martyrs in Manasseh's days had been the seed of the Church, as it has often been since. Prophets moved about among the people, stirring them up to a purer life and to an awakened zeal for the faith of their fathers. Zephaniah spoke in the streets of Jerusalem, and Jeremiah was beginning to be known in Anathoth, in Benjamin, not far from the capital. The discourses of Isaiah were, doubtless, still repeated in the homes of

¹ 2 Chron xxxiii. 11.

the godly, and copies of them and of other sacred memorials must have been in circulation.

Of the influences amidst which Josiah was brought up we know nothing particularly, but it is certain that they must have been those of the best of the old puritan party, for already, in his sixteenth year, he publicly showed himself zealous for the worship and honour of "the God of David, his father," and his reign, thenceforth, was devoted to the restoration of the ancient religion in all its earnestness and ceremonial fulness.

The times were favourable to such a movement, for not only had a reaction in favour of Jehovah-worship set in among the people at large: the external relations of the country were such as left it freer to carry out such a religious revolution than it had been for generations. The Assyrian kingdom had failed to maintain the wide power attained under King Assurbanipal, and had, apparently under his immediate successor, lost all the conquests made by him with so much expenditure of blood and treasure. Though he had vigorously attacked and severely chastised the races on the east of his empire, especially the Medes, these kingdoms not only speedily regained their freedom, but under their king, Vakestar, the Cyaxares of the Greeks, marched against Nineveh itself. This enterprise, however, was defeated by one of those historical phenomena which were so frequently to recur in later ages—the overflow of vast hordes of barbarians from the savage north, on the richer and more civilized lands of the south and west.

A number of warlike, unsettled tribes, known as Saci, or Scythians, had till this time roamed over the Russian steppes and the trans-Caucasian regions. They had already driven before them the race known as Cimmerians,

the vanquished tribes passing on to Asia Minor; but now, while Cyaxares was investing Nineveh, immense swarms of the Scythians themselves unexpectedly broke through the mountain passes, and, attacking him fiercely, not only compelled him to raise the siege, but subjugated nearly all Media, so that Cyaxares for many years maintained himself only with difficulty against them. All Asia, in its more cultivated regions, trembled before this sudden irruption of desolating barbarians. The Cimmerian hordes, after wasting all before them, finally spent their force against the kingdom of Lydia, in Asia Minor, and sank into weakness, but the Scythians showed themselves the true precursors of the hordes of Attila, by the more or less complete overthrow, with indescribable ferocity, of all the kingdoms on the east of the Taurus range. Their fresh and, as yet, unbroken vigour destroyed all before it. On the swift and hardy horses of the steppes they overran the lands which they had invaded only for plunder, ravaging the open country rather than besieging the cities, which was a task beyond their military skill, though they were able, notwithstanding, to overawe and gain not a few fortified towns. So terrible was their advance that the settled populations everywhere fled before them, and so deeply was the memory of their invasion stamped on all the nations between Persia and the Mediterranean, that they became, even to the prophet Ezekiel, a symbol of desolating vengeance, as the Parthians of a later age did to the Apostle John. No wonder that the later Persian kings, Cyrus and Darius, dreading a repetition of such a calamity, strove to avert it by an invasion of Scythia, as the Romans strove to ward off the inroads of the German and Celtic nations by carrying their arms beyond the Alps.

These terrible invaders seem to have left Nineveh untouched, as too strong for them to take, but only after being richly bribed to turn aside. Passing on to the south-west, they overran the territory from which the Ten Tribes had been carried off to Assyria almost a century before, and advanced to Egypt, which Psammetichus, the king, succeeded, by rich gifts, in bribing them not to invade. They took Askelon in the Philistine plain, however, and left their name in central Palestine, in which Bethshean was henceforth known as the "town of the Scythians." But, like the hordes of Attila, they had come only to waste and plunder, and speedily withdrew, when the land could yield them nothing more.

It may be easily conjectured that such an appalling danger prepared the popular mind in Judæa to listen, with un-

wonted readiness, to the exhortations of prophets like Zephaniah and Jeremiah, who called all to repentance in presence of such a visitation. It was still in the early youth of Josiah when Jerusalem and the country round trembled at this unprecedented peril, and no beginning had as yet been made to rouse the kingdom from the deep corruption into which it had sunk during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, and in the minority of Josiah himself. If, as has been conjectured from



PSAMMETICHUS.

the language of the fifty-ninth Psalm, which some have attributed to Josiah, Jerusalem itself was besieged or imperilled by these Tartar hordes during their march against Egypt, the depth of the popular excitement may be more readily imagined.

Josiah was little over twenty years of age when the danger was at its height. In his utmost need he had remained firm in his trust on Jehovah for deliverance, and resolved, when that deliverance came, to show his gratitude by a thorough reformation of the religion of the land. Acting as only Eastern monarchs can, he set about ridding the country of every trace of idolatry. The weakness of the Assyrian monarchy had left the whole of Palestine open to him, and he had consequently extended his territory over the former bounds of the Ten Tribes, as far as Naphtali, so that the reformation could be carried out on a great scale.

Officers, duly appointed, forthwith commenced the purification of the land. The work began in Jerusalem. The images and altars of Baal were everywhere destroyed: the Asherahs and idols of various kinds were broken to pieces and ground to dust, which was strewn on graves, to defile for ever what had been consecrated to such uses. The sun, the moon, and the signs of the zodiac had each its idolatrous symbols, but all these were now utterly removed. Human bones burned on the heathen altars rendered them for ever unclean. The Valley of Hinnom—"The wailing of children"—was in the same way desecrated, that no one might any longer sacrifice his son or his daughter there to Moloch, as in the past. The horses used by the kings of Judah in state processions of Baal he removed, and burned the chariots they had drawn in these pageants. Altars had been raised to idols on the

roof of the palace by former monarchs; but they also were destroyed, and the same fate befel those which Manasseh had set up in the courts of the Temple. Their very dust was carried out of the city, and strewed in the neighbouring valley of the Kidron. The high places, or altars built by Solomon for Ashtoreth,—“The abomination of the people of Sidon,”—and for Chemosh,—“The abomination of the Moabites,”—and for Milcom,—“The abomination of the Ammonites,”—were defiled, and the whole city thoroughly freed, for the first time for centuries, from the heathen sacred places and symbols, which Solomon had first introduced with such lamentable consequences.

Nor did the work end with this. The ox-symbols of Bethel perished; and everywhere else, through the territory of all Israel, to the far north, no relic of idolatry was suffered to remain.

It was the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign before this great undertaking was thoroughly completed. Josiah was now twenty-six years of age, and seemed to have had his zeal quickened rather than exhausted by his past activity. An event now took place fraught with the most lasting consequences to all Israel. The Temple had been allowed to fall into disrepair in the heathen times gone by, and commands were given to restore it. Funds were obtained by voluntary contributions from all Judah, and from the remnant of the Ten Tribes remaining in Israel. Mount Moriah was crowded with artificers of all kinds, under whose hands the desolate sanctuary gradually rose again to its former beauty.

In the midst of these renovations, Hilkiyah, the high priest, having entered some long overlooked chamber, found a manuscript which proved to be no less than a

copy of "the Law of Jehovah given to Moses." So utterly had religion decayed that the sacred documents of the nation had fallen out of sight, and almost of memory; but, under such a king as Josiah, the discovery of a copy of these priceless treasures was sure to be rightly used. It was duly handed to Shaphan, a scribe, who carried it to Josiah, and read it in his hearing. The promises and curses it contained filled him with equal alarm, for Judah had evidently forfeited the one, and drawn down on itself the other. Huldah, a prophetess, was consulted, and her words only deepened the alarm. The elders of the people were next convened, with the priests and people at large, as far as the courts of the Temple could give them standing room, and the "Law" was read aloud in their hearing.

The covenant made by Israel with Jehovah of old had been utterly violated, but Josiah was not without hope that, if it were renewed on the side of the people, God might once more favour them. There and then, therefore, he formally entered into it again, the nation by their representatives present joining him in the solemn transaction.

Nine hundred years before, Moses had instituted the Passover as a great yearly solemnity, but it had been rarely observed after his death, and apparently had been entirely neglected for centuries. Once, in Joshua's day, it had been observed with great solemnity, but although Solomon offered great sacrifices, and kept a feast of two weeks' duration at the consecration of the Temple, the Passover is not mentioned from Joshua's day to that of Josiah, a period of about eight hundred and fifty years. The long centuries of confusion and barbarism, known as the age of the Judges, had well-

nigh obliterated every remembrance of the ancient religion, except the fact that Jehovah was the God of the land, however little honoured. The ceremonial worship established by David and Solomon had speedily fallen into disuse amidst the growth of heathenism which marked the reign of the latter, and it had only for a brief moment, at widely distant intervals, been restored since.

To make the installation of the national faith complete, the Passover was now once more to be held. Many priests had served Jehovah in connection with the ox-symbols of Bethel, and others had in various ways rendered themselves disqualified for priestly duties. These were relegated to inferior posts, and made to eat apart. Others not thus defiled were put in training; a choir of Levites was enrolled; the Temple service was carefully reconstituted, and in due time the Passover was held with the utmost exactness, by all the people, with the king and court at their head.

From this time nothing is told during an interval of thirteen years. Meanwhile Josiah had prospered and had won the loving admiration of his subjects. He was now thirty-nine years of age, and might have expected many years of useful and honoured life. But his end was near.

The weakness of the Assyrian monarchy had tempted Pharaoh Necho, a warlike king of Egypt, to enter into an alliance with Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, against Nineveh, and for this end he marched an army along the sea-coast plain of Palestine, to that of Esdraelon, on his way to the Euphrates. From whatever motive, Josiah, though remonstrated with by Necho himself, determined to bar the way, and the result was a battle, near the town of Megiddo, in which this, the last king of

Judah who merited the name of great or good, fell, mortally wounded.

The intensity of the sorrow felt for him by all his people may be gathered from many indications left us. His memory was cherished in ballads sung by generation after generation. Jeremiah lamented him in his prophecies, and the fatal spot where he perished became so identified in the Jewish mind with slaughter and woe, that in the Apocalypse the last terrible visitation of mystic vision is described as taking place at a spot "called, in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon,"¹—"The hill of Megiddo,"—the scene of Josiah's death, and of the eclipse of the last glory of Judah!

¹ Rev. xvi. 16.





JEHOIAKIM.

B.C. 598-610.

THE rout of the army of Judah under Josiah, at the fatal battle of Megiddo, had been so complete, that Pharaoh Necho, the victor, did not turn from his onward march against Nineveh, to follow it up. Three months after the death of the Jewish king, he had pitched his camp, for the time, at Riblah, near Hamath, on the Orontes, a town on the direct road to the Euphrates, having already, by his advance, made himself master of the Assyrian province of Northern Syria.

Left thus to themselves the population of Jerusalem foolishly imagined they were still independent, and proceeded to elect a king in the room of Josiah. There were three surviving princes from whom to chose, sons of their late ruler by different mothers—Eliakim, the eldest, son of Zebudah, and Shallum and Mattaniah, sons of Hamutal.¹ From what reason is not stated, popular favour selected the fourth son, Shallum, perhaps as a child of the best-loved wife of Josiah. Having received the sacred anointing from the high

¹ There had been four, but the eldest had apparently died (1 Chron. iii. 15).

priest, the new monarch, according to custom, assumed a new name—Jehoahaz—He whom Jehovah sustains; but his reign only lasted till messengers from Riblah announced the displeasure of the Pharaoh at his accession. Henceforward Judah was to remember it was a vassal province, and leave the appointment of its ruler to the Egyptian suzerain. To have allowed himself to be chosen king, and to have accepted the dignity without the sanction of Necho, was audacity to be sorely punished. Resistance to the Egyptian mandate was useless, and Jehoahaz, bowing to his fate, was carried off a prisoner to Riblah. Thence he seems to have been sent at once to Egypt, where he lingered as a captive, no one knows how long, till his death. Far better have died on the field of battle like his father. He had given promise of vigour, for Ezekiel describes him as a “young lion that had learned to catch his prey, to devour men.” But “the heathen heard of him, and he was snared in their pit, and they led him off with a ring in his lips, to the land of Egypt.” “Weep not for the dead,” cried Jeremiah in allusion to his fate, “neither bewail him; but weep sore for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.”

In his place Pharaoh set up Eliakim, the elder brother, as a puppet king, on the condition of his paying tribute to his liege lord, and in all things obeying his will. The name chosen by the new dignitary was Jehoiakim—He whom Jehovah has set up.

The character of the master thus imposed on Judah by its conqueror was shown by his accepting the crown on such terms. He agreed to pay yearly to Egypt, one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold, equal, nominally, to from £80,000 to £90,000, but of very much

greater value than that sum is now. To so small a kingdom as Judah this was a terrible burden, but its pressure was aggravated by the harsh and unfeeling coarseness used to extort it from the petty community. Nor was this the heaviest of their taxes. Armed men were employed to wring from the people further heavy amounts, to enable Jehoiakim to play the king on a scale far beyond what his little principality was able to bear. Without ordinary prudence as well as without heart, he lavished expense on royal state and grand buildings, adorning Jerusalem, already sinking to its final ruin—as men at a later time said—like a sacrifice wreathed with garlands when about to be led to the altar. A great palace was built by forced labour,¹ with spacious halls roofed with cedar from Lebanon, lighted by many windows, and set off with vermillion. Other notable structures also rose in the city, and perhaps, among the rest, the stronghold on Ophel, begun by Manasseh,² and known as “his house, in the garden of Uzzah.” How much suffering and wrong all this involved reveals itself in the language used respecting the tyrant—that “he built the city with blood, and his citadel with iniquity.”

The prosperity of the reign of Josiah had perished with him. Judah had lost the flower of its manhood in the disastrous battle in which he fell. Ere long his youngest son lay a captive in the dungeons of Pharaoh. Men had fancied that when the worship of Jehovah was set up so zealously by the good king, and “the Book of the Law,” then newly found, had been made the basis of a covenant between God and His people, a bright future awaited them. But the Indian summer of Josiah’s reign had soon ended in ever deepening gloom.

¹ Jer. xxii. 12.

² 2 Kings xxi. 18.

Troubles seemed to chase each other like the shadows of clouds over the fields. Men began to look back to the days of heathenism, and fancy they were as happy as the present were sad, for distance always softens the landscape. "We shall burn incense," said the people, "and pour out drink-offerings to the queen of heaven, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of victual, and were well, and saw no evil."

Jehoiakim was only too ready to give his support to this reaction in favour of idolatry, and it consequently grew rampant. The great prophets of the time, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, paint a state of things otherwise almost incredible. In some of the underground chambers or vaults of the Temple the sacred animals of Egypt, the gods of Jehoiakim's patron, Pharaoh, were worshipped amidst clouds of incense. At the north gate of the Temple women sat wailing aloud for the death of the Phenician god Tammuz or Adonis.¹ Still worse, in the inner court, between the porch of the Holy Place and the great brazen altar before it, Ezekiel saw a gathering of priests standing with their backs to the Temple and their faces to the east, worshipping the rising sun, as the god Baal. The gods of Judah were as numerous as her towns.² Idols of gold and silver, wood and stone were worshipped in private houses; the obscene symbols of Baal worship among others.³ The hill tops smoked with the sacrifices of idolatrous high places. Every clump of green trees was defiled by the impure rites of Astarte. In the valley of Hinnom, under the walls of Jerusalem, was once more heard

¹ Ezek. viii. 3, 10, 11, 14.

² Jer. xi. 13.

³ Jer. vii. 31; xix. 5. Isa. lvii. 5.

the wild tumult of Moloch worship in which children were burnt alive to propitiate the god.

The morals of the State were in keeping with this degraded religion. In the pages of the prophets they are painted as utterly corrupt in all grades of society. A little band, indeed, remained faithful to Jehovah, with men like Jeremiah, Baruch, Habakkuk, and Urijah, the prophets, as its animating spirits, but they were powerless to stem the torrent of evil. They were, indeed, exposed to relentless and constant opposition for their fidelity in rebuking the sin around them. Life became a burden to them so that they sighed for a "lodge in the wilderness" to escape from the confusion and sin around, but duty forbade their withdrawing from the sphere in which their Master had placed them, as long as it was possible to remain in it. Some even suffered the last extremities of persecution. Jeremiah had to endure the stocks and the underground rain-pit, made into a prison, and had to flee from Judah to save his life. Urijah fled, but only to be brought back from Egypt, at the request of Jehoiakim to his master the Pharaoh, and basely put to death in Jerusalem. Nature itself seemed, at times, to protest against such wickedness, for the heavens refused their rain, and the country languished under a terrible drought;¹ the punishment, said the prophets, of the prevailing iniquity. Attack from without was foretold, with utter ruin of the country and captivity of the population in a foreign land. The relations with Egypt would bring this about. Such an attitude on the part of the preachers of the day, directly opposing the sentiment and practice of their contemporaries, made the prophets hated by high and low. The strict observance of the

¹ Jer. xiv. 6.

Sabbath under Josiah had given place to general profanation of its sacred hours. The weekly market, with its noisy huckstering and traffic, was held on the sacred day. This also the prophets vigorously denounced, but without moving the people to a reformation.

Meanwhile Nineveh had fallen, and the power of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar was in the ascendant. He had shattered the army of Pharaoh at the battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates, and marched towards Palestine to wrest it from Egypt and bring it once more under Assyrian influence, as in former times. The heir of Assyria, he claimed all its provinces. Jeremiah from the first saw the result. Babylon would conquer. Judah would be crushed and its people carried into slavery for seventy years, in Babylonia. Things were coming to a crisis. Every attempt to rouse the nation to religious reform, in which alone lay its safety, had failed. The faithful prophet, as a last effort, caused all his utterances, duly written out on a long roll, to be read aloud before a great assembly of the people, in the Temple, when it was thronged with worshippers. The terrible words alarmed them all. A visible shudder ran through the hearers.¹ At last, when Nebuchadnezzar was approaching Jerusalem, they realized that Jeremiah spoke for God. Prayer and lamentation filled the air. The excitement spread through the city. Baruch, who had read out the prophet's words in the Temple, was brought to the chamber of the royal council and required to read them again. It was then felt that the king himself must hear words so ominous and of such Divine authority. The roll was taken to the palace where Jehoiakim sat, in a chamber heated by a brazier on the floor, as the custom is still, it being in the cold

¹ *Heb.*, Jer. xxxvi. 16.

winter months. But the hope that he would bow before the awful words of the seer was soon disappointed. Seizing the roll from the hand of the reader, he deliberately cut it into fragments with a scribe's knife, and burnt them in the glowing charcoal. He laughed at God and man! Could he get hold of the prophets they should pay with their lives for troubling him thus. Jeremiah and Baruch had to flee into concealment, whence the prophet seems to have escaped and wandered to Babylon, returning only after Jehoiakim's death.

Such defiant impiety drew down on it from the Almighty, through His insulted servant, the utterance of a curse terrible even yet to read. He would have no son to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body would be cast out, to lie, unburied, in the heat by day and the frost by night.¹ He would be buried with the burial of an ass.²



EGYPTIANS PRAYING.—Wilkinson.

The summons of Nebuchadnezzar had forced Jehoiakim instantly to abandon his Egyptian relations and submit, in terror, to the Chaldeans. Had he been loyal to his new masters, his reign, though ignominious, might have continued to his death, however long he lived. But after three years of compulsory submission, he was mad enough to listen to the Egyptian faction in Jerusalem, who counselled a revolt in favour of Necho, the defeated foe of Nebuchadnezzar. Swift vengeance followed. A

¹ Jer. xxxvi. 29-31.

² Jer. xxii. 13-19.

Chaldean force appeared at the gates of the city, which were necessarily thrown open before it, that prompt repentance might mitigate punishment. But a severe penalty was exacted. Heavier tribute than before was imposed, and Judah saw with shame the finest vessels of the Temple carried off as spoil to grace the heathen shrines of Babylon.

The closing years of Jehoiakim's reign were increasingly calamitous. Forced to submit to the Chaldeans, but in heart passionately Egyptian, he struggled against a fate which he could not alter. Secret plotting only irritated Nebuchadnezzar. That the country should be constantly disturbed by the refractoriness of a poor kinglet like Jehoiakim was intolerable. Circumstances prevented the Chaldean king sending an army, but he could let loose on Jerusalem the turbulent fighting men of southern Syria—Moab and Ammon—the hereditary enemies of the Jew. Their raids might sweep up the passes and waste the country. Jehoiakim could be paralysed in his sinister activity for Egypt, until the Great King was ready to swoop down on his capital and destroy him. The fate of Judah was disastrous. Assailed by all the nations round, the prophets could only compare her to a speckled bird attacked by all its neighbours.¹

At last, in B.C. 598, Nebuchadnezzar set out to conquer Egypt, marching necessarily along the coast of Palestine. With his army were strong contingents from all the native races, every one of which hated Judah. But before Jerusalem could be taken Jehoiakim died, it is not known how. He may have fallen in a skirmish, or it may have been that he met his death in a battle with the Chaldeans, and was left unburied. One tra-

¹ Jer. xii. 7-17.

dition speaks of him as having been murdered in Jerusalem and cast out in the streets; another, of his having been enticed to Nebuchadnezzar's camp and then put to death and left without a grave.

But whatever the mode of his death, no funeral dirge was raised for this recreant son of Josiah, and his corpse was left to rot on the waste ground outside the gates. Ultimately, indeed, according to the Greek Bible, his body was rescued from this last disgrace and interred with that of his father in the garden of Uzzah. But the Rabbis tell us that on the parched skin of the corpse, as it lay naked before all, were to be seen the letters of the name Codonazer, the devil to whom he had sold his soul.¹

¹ *Thenius* on 2 Kings xxiv. 6.



MOLOCH-OX-HEADED, ON A GEM FROM NINEVEH (page 401).—*Layard*.



JOB.

THE Book of Job, at what period soever it may have been written, brings before us a picture of the patriarchal age. Its descriptions of manners and customs, domestic, social, and political, and even its indirect allusions and illustrations, breathe of the earliest times. It carries us to the tent of an Eastern Emir, living as a petty prince amidst his followers and friends and herds. We feel the air of the desert, and meet an antique simplicity of life that carries us back to remote ages.

The scene is laid in the land of Uz, a district somewhere in the region of Bashan, across the Jordan,¹ bordering the eastern desert, so that the wandering robber hordes of Chaldeans could make an easy descent on it, and open on the south to Edom. Eliphaz and Teman are Idumæan names, and other indications of relationship to Edom occur. The caravan route to Egypt ran through it, and created an intercourse with that country which explains the many references found in Job to the animals of Egypt, and to its customs and civilization.

Job is represented as the head of a great pastoral household, like Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. Like the Emirs still found in the wide open spaces of the East, he possessed immense wealth in cattle and flocks. Seven

¹ *Hours with the Bible*, i. 262.

thousand sheep and three thousand camels grazed under the charge of his shepherds ; five hundred yoke of oxen bespoke his having wide stretches of land under the plough, and five hundred she-asses supplied milk for his family and attendants, and provided the means of easy travelling and of state. The horse had not yet been introduced as the pride and glory of an Arab establishment. Such wealth implies what the sacred narrative tells us, that Job's household was very great ; that, in fact, he was a Sheik, with many hundred men and their families dependent on him, and obeying him as their chief and master.

Surrounded by such patriarchal glory, Job might have been excused had he looked upon his position as beyond the reach of misfortune, so far as regarded his temporal ease and comfort. One son is counted in the East a special honour, in the guarantee it gives of the perpetuation of his father's house and name, but Job had no fewer than seven, and he had, besides, three daughters, whose future alliances he might anticipate as so many additions to the family dignity and consequence.

While thus exalted in station, he was, moreover, very much higher in culture than personages in the same social position among pastoral tribes in the East in our own day. Like Isaac he pitched his tents in districts near the busy life of towns, and at times even exchanged the primitive state of his Arab life for the streets and market-places of the city.

There he was treated, as we can fancy Abraham to have been among the people of his time, as a prince, a judge, and a famous warrior,¹ before whom the young shrank back, as unworthy to stand in his presence,

¹ Job xxix. 7-17.

while the old rose up to pay him reverence, and princes and nobles were silent, waiting till he should speak. Among them all he was raised to be the judge, from whose seat in the gate, or in the market-place, supreme decisions were to go forth.

Nor was his intelligence merely the shrewdness of local knowledge. Either from living on the line of commercial intercourse with Egypt, or from having travelled in that country himself, he describes the Egyptian gold mines in the peninsula of Sinai; the great buildings of the Nile valleys, and its great tombs; the war horse, for which Egypt was then famous; and the hippopotamus and crocodile of its mighty river. The arts and productions of the Egyptians also are often alluded to by him, and he was even acquainted with their forms of legal procedure.¹

It was a wise proverb, however, of antiquity, that no one should be counted happy till the whole of his life had run. Calamity had marked this supremely prosperous man as its own. He was a pattern of simple devoutness, for not even a household festivity could be held without his following it by a burnt-offering for each of his children, presented at the earliest light of the following morning, lest they might have sinned during their rejoicings. It seemed as if such humble godliness might itself have been a hedge to him from all afflictive visitations. But, as the old puritans were wont to say, you can never judge the heart of God from His hand, for, to use the words of St. Paul, "whom He loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Job was to drink the cup of misery to the dregs.

¹ Job iii. 13, 14; vii. 12; viii. 11-13; ix. 26; xxvii. 16; xxviii. 1-11; xxxi. 35.

His calamity was all the heavier that it burst on him without warning. The same day saw his flocks and herds driven off by plundering bands from the wilderness or destroyed by a storm, and his sons and daughters killed at one stroke by a wild desert whirlwind. From a great and prosperous Sheik he had sunk at once to abject poverty. Even his servants were gone, for the robber hordes who had carried off his oxen, and sheep, and asses, and camels, had slain all his dependants in their defence of their master's property.

Nothing can be grander than the spirit in which Job is represented as receiving the terrible news of disaster after disaster. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb," said he, "and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." Rending his mantle and shaving his head, in token of profound grief, he still clung to his religious trust, and prostrating himself on the earth, worshipped the great name of his God.

But there was still a lower depth of trouble before him. Leprosy, in its worst form of elephantiasis, broke out on his body, and he had to go outside the city, away from man, and was fain to rest on the ash heaps beyond the walls.

The object of recounting this story of unparalleled affliction is evident from what follows. It was to give an opportunity for full discussion of the great question of the origin of evil in human life, to expose the fallacy of some opinions held respecting it, and to vindicate, in the end, the ways of Providence to man.

Even to the latest periods it was the prevailing idea of antiquity that special afflictions were the direct punishment of corresponding sins committed by the sufferer, or, in some extreme cases, by his parents or

forefathers. But even when the greatness of the punishment seemed excessive as a retribution for the sins of the afflicted one, it was still held, that but for his being a sinner personally, the curse would not have descended on him.

It is no wonder that the ancient world had not clearer ideas of the cause of suffering, for the mystery of evil is too great, the various circumstances that entail affliction too numerous and complicated, to make an explanation easy. In any case, it is certain that the notion of exact retaliation, which is found in the laws of Moses, was supposed by antiquity at large to be that on which Providence acted. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, became the fundamental conception of the Divine government, not only among the Jews, but among other nations. Thus, when Hillel, the greatest of the Rabbis, saw a skull floating on the water, he is said to have cried out, "Thou art thyself drowned because thou hast drowned some one, and he who drowned thee will himself be drowned!"

That this should have been so shows that the lessons of the Book of Job were lost on Jewish theologians, for it is its great object to combat such a conception of the providential government of God. The wisdom and experience of the age are introduced in the utterances of three friends, who come to condole with the sufferer, but cannot, in spite of their sympathy, rid themselves of the belief that there must be a secret cause, in Job's sinfulness, for such a visitation. Step by step their views are given, with great beauty and poetic power, but Job in each case repudiates their premises or conclusions, and in the end he is justified by God Himself in his refusal to admit them. The secrets of the Divine government remain indeed, as they must ever remain,

impenetrable, but the lessons of care and goodness seen in nature, are made the sufficient grounds for a firm confidence that the same wisdom and love rule in the affairs of men.

The narrative in which all this is embodied, is touching and dramatic in the highest degree. Job is represented as having been so long struck with the leprosy, that it has shown itself offensively on his skin, thus marking him, as it were, with the special sign of Divine anger. Three of his friends, having heard of his calamity, come from their distant homes to condole with him: Eliphaz,—“God is his strength,”—from a part of Arabia or Edom called Teman; Bildad,—“The son of contention,”—of the Arab tribe of Shuhites; and Zophar, from a district called Naamah, now unknown.

In accordance with Eastern manners, the three friends sat in silence on the ground beside Job for a whole week; their heads strewn with dust and their mantles rent, in token of profound grief. But though they showed the outward forms of sympathy they were far from thinking that the sufferings they lamented were undeserved; and at last, on Job's passionately bewailing his ever having been born, could no longer restrain remonstrance with him, on what seemed his self-righteous spirit. In their eyes he ought rather to have owned the sin which had brought on him such a visitation.

Eliphaz was the first to speak, and he does so with art and tenderness, mingled with what he deemed faithfulness. Convinced of Job's guilt, he yet desires to spare him as much as possible. He reminds him of his former position as contrasted with his present, and the suspicion that cannot be kept back of there being a cause for it. As he goes on he passes to more open

blame, rising, as it were, from a gentle breath to a strong and overpowering wind, in his discourse. In his experience only the wicked, struck by God's avenging anger, are crushed hopelessly. Man is unclean, in any case, before the Almighty, and hence doomed to affliction. He cannot, therefore, without the boldest sin, venture to be offended at God's dispensations. Yet he hopes the best from the Divine mercy, for it can deliver man, when penitent, from the worst calamities, and give him a happy close of life.

Job's reply expresses his bitter disappointment at the tone of Eliphaz. He is unwilling to enter into any controversy, but he cannot refrain from repudiating having ever acted consciously against God. He cannot refrain his laments, for no man had ever suffered as he has done. His despairing wish for death must find vent. His friends have dug a pit for him: their first words of comfort have been like a passing stream, which has left dry the channel that for a time promised so fair. Why does God visit a weak child of dust so terribly, even if he have sinned? why does He not pardon, rather than punish, one so helpless?

In this speech Job had put a new weapon into the hands of his censors, for he had, apparently, charged God with unrighteousness, at least in his case. Bildad forthwith replies that it is wicked even to think that God could be unjust. He cannot do what is wrong; and since sufferings are assumed to be punishment for sin, He cannot punish the innocent. Therefore let Job repent, that he may have his afflictions removed by Divine grace, before certain destruction strike him down, as it does all the foolish who think they can prosper without God's help. He quotes the belief of the ancients, that every sinner is on the way to sure

and sudden destruction ; but if Job return to God by repentance He will yet fill his mouth with laughing and his lips with rejoicing.

Job sees that he has wholly failed to bring his friends to his way of thinking, and that it has been of no use that he kept from discussion with them. He shrinks even yet from openly arguing against them, but cannot refrain from noticing the main points in their speeches. He does so, as if talking with himself rather than answering them ; admitting what he had felt to be true in their words, but yet caring little to defend himself from their reproofs. He grants all that has been said of the Divine power and human weakness, for he realizes them better than his friends themselves. He knows it all, but will say nothing, though convinced of his innocence, since God may, if He choose, go even further and crush him utterly. Feeling thus, instead of thinking with comfort of the power of the Almighty and the weakness of man, he rather finds in these facts his deepest sorrow. The wisdom of his friends sounds like mockery, and he retorts it with bitter irony.

Yet his clear and quiet conscience cannot allow him to be silent, though he knows the risk he incurs. He must freely and without reserve say what he thinks of the mysterious and apparently contradictory ways of God. He cannot think of Him as his friends do, and breaks out into biting, almost despairing, bitterness against them. Then, having overthrown their theories, he sinks again into sad silence.

Not disconcerted by the discomfiture of the others, Zophar now proceeds to give his opinion and counsel. The youngest of the three, he would rather have remained silent, but the tone of Job, more and more self-confident, and, as it seemed to him, presumptuous, forces

him to speak. He hopes to end the controversy by an unexpected utterance. Job, after appealing to God's judgment, had presently drawn back ; but now Zophar, despairing of a human solution of the vexed question, breaks out into a wish that God would in reality appear and bring to silence one who would not confess that his afflictions had come in punishment for his sins. His wish is in reality a confession of weakness for himself and his friends ; an admission that God alone can prove the correctness of their firm belief that secret sin, if not open, had brought all this misery on the sufferer. If Job will himself admit that it is so all will be well ; but if he still refuse to own it the result will be even worse than now.

The speech at Zophar, which was intended to surprise and bow down Job in lowly submission, had, strange to say, the very opposite effect, for it is forthwith turned into a victorious weapon against his opponents, and instead of humbling him, seems, for the first time, to raise him from his depression and confusion of mind. How can he who boasts of his innocence and even of his trust in God, let himself be reproached as suffering far less than his sins have deserved ? He still clings to the feeling that God acts towards him as a strong man might to a weak creature unable to oppose him, and seems to think that his friends speak so bitterly as they do because they side, ungenerously, with the strong against the weak. But he cannot believe that God will in any way do what is wrong, either in letting him permanently suffer, or in letting his friends thus reproach him. They have appealed to the Almighty against him : he will appeal to Him in his own favour, and will complain to Him against them as the guilty. They had made the grand error of thinking

that prosperity or the reverse were indications of the Divine favour or anger, and thus, in effect, rewards and punishments. But he himself is equally wrong in the same way, for he clings to the belief that his life had been a blameless, and therefore should, of right, have been a happy one.

This error shows itself in the questionable bearing Job assumes in his language before he closes. He can scarcely keep from blaming the Almighty, and cannot ward off the old feeling of despair, when he comes to think of the mystery of Providence that presses him down so heavily. He sees no escape but in the grave. He will wait all the days of his appointed time till his change cometh. But even here he is on the confines of brighter hopes, for beyond death there will presently break on him the light of a better world.



THE EGYPTIAN HIPPOPOTAMUS (page 408; Job xl. 10; Ps. lxxviii. 31).



JOB'S FRIENDS.

THE address of Zophar, though shorter than the discourses of Eliphaz and Bildad, had been little fitted to calm and comfort Job in his afflictions. To feel his innocency and yet be told that he was "a man full of talk," that his lies should be exposed, and his jeers turned back on him to his shame; to hear, moreover, that there was no question that all he suffered was just punishment for his sins, and to have to listen again to the commonplaces already twice inflicted on him; that if he repented all would be well, and that he would lie down once more in peace—was hard to bear, and presently called forth a still more embittered reply than any of the preceding.

"No doubt," answered the sufferer, "but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you!" and then he passed on to justify all he had said of his own integrity. He is ready to slip with his feet, and is, therefore, naturally despised by him that is at ease. He is as one mocked of his neighbour, but yet he dares call on God, and He will answer him!

If they will have it, his trials come from the sovereign power of God, who shuts up a man, and there can be no opening but by His hand. HE spoils counsellors, makes judges fools, looses the bonds of kings, over-

throws the mighty, pours contempt on princes, and weakens the strength of the great. Well, therefore, may his afflictions have proceeded from Him at His mere pleasure, and not as punishment for sin.

Yet the hand that is strong to smite is also strong to save. He will trust in God though He slay him; he knows that Jehovah, in His own good time, will become



ARABS OF THE ADWAN TRIBE.—*Captain Conder, R.E.*

his salvation. As to those who reprove him, they are forgers of lies and physicians of no value!

Yet he cannot be silent. His troubles overpower him. Why should God break a leaf driven to and fro, or chase the dry stubble? Why should He make him "as a rotten thing that consumeth, and as a garment that is moth-eaten"? Then, once more he falls into gloom that borders on despair. Man's lot is sad in-

deed ! Would that God would hide him in the grave ; that He would keep him secret till His wrath were past. But hope breaks in even amidst all this sadness. Is there not a hereafter ? May not God, even in the dust, appoint him a set time and remember him ? He had found the true support under his trials, the true solution of the enigma they offered. Yet he only dimly realizes it as yet, and closes his discourse by words of the deepest sadness.

The disconcerted friends were, however, unwilling to let Job triumph, and returned to the task of condemning him. Eliphaz, as their head, from his position, experience, and wisdom, once more becomes their mouthpiece. Ready to blame the confident bearing of Job, and to argue the worst results from it, it was necessary first to humble one so proud and unsubmissive, and thus assume again an air of superiority, to give the reproof weight.

He tells him, therefore, that his own words condemn him ; that he has shown an open want of fear of God and has answered with words of crafty wickedness. But he has no cause to hold himself so loftily, either over his fellow-men, or towards God. Every man is, at best, a sinner, and why should he dare to turn his spirit against God, and let such words go out of his mouth ? Yet the speech which is thus introduced, is only a lengthened and terrible picture of the admitted truth, that the every one shows, by his living only for himself, that he slights both God and man, is troubled in heart, at least at times, during life, and that all he has is insecure. It is the old doctrine that sin brings its own punishment in this world, and that Job only suffers because he is guilty.

The afflicted man in his answer makes little attempt at direct contradiction of what has been said. He is too

utterly bowed down by the additional sorrow of feeling that even his friends had risen against him in his hour of need. Everything seems to be turned to his hurt by God : his very neighbours have been made into enemies, as one of the many terrible results of the mysterious anger of Providence. It seems as if death alone would give him respite from his calamities. God has delivered him to the ungodly, and turned him over to the hands of the wicked. He has shaken him to pieces, and set him up as a mark for the arrows of His wrath.

Yet he bates nothing of his firm confidence in his own integrity. If he weeps, it is not for any injustice on his hands, and his prayer is pure. If he is to die with no justification from God, he trusts that the earth will not cover his blood,—the blood of an innocent man,—but will let it remain before all eyes, imperishable, as the witness of his uprightness, and that his cry for vindication will sound on, and rise even to heaven ! Even now, forsaken as he is by men, the witness to his integrity lives above. Its record is in heaven !

But he cannot, after all, despair that God will show Himself in the end. He may have made him a mocking to his friends and covered him with sorrow, but, in the end, the righteous will hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands will wax stronger and stronger. As to this life, however, he has no more hope. He has said to corruption, Thou art my father ; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.

In this last speech the patriarch adds some bitter words to his former reproaches of his friends. He had told them there was not a wise man among them, and had spoken of them as ungodly and wicked. Bildad now feels himself so aggrieved at this, that he can no longer be silent, and casts back on the sufferer all his re-

proaches, ascribing them to the wild despair of one who felt his wickedness, but would not own it. Yet, let him not deceive himself. The light of the wicked would be put out; evil of all kinds would surely destroy him. However the ungodly resist, it is useless in the end, and only leads to irremediable and permanent destruction. Their remembrance would perish from the earth, and they would have no name in the street.

The stricken heart had endured all till now, and had even returned reproach for reproach, but he is too utterly crushed to bear himself thus any longer. Bitter words, he tells his friends, are out of place. Let them only think of his sorrows, and they would no longer persecute him and wear away his heart. "Have pity on me, have pity on me," he cries, "O ye my friends; for the hand of God has touched me!"

Yet, however crushed in worldly hopes, the light from another world which has already broken the gloom will, henceforth, he declares, be his stay and rejoicing!

"I know," says he, "that my Redeemer (or Avenger) liveth,
And, as he who follows me, will stand upon the earth;
And after my skin (perishes), for it is indeed destroyed,
I, freed from my body, will, myself, see God.
For I, to my good, will see Him,
Mine eyes will see Him—mine, and not those of another!"¹

Having thus sung its note of triumph, the weary heart would fain have peace, and closes with an earnest entreaty that his friends should cease further troubling him.

"If you think, 'How shall we follow him up,'
And that 'the root of the matter'—the cause of my afflictions
—'is found in my own sin,'

¹ Translations of Ewald and Merx.

Beware of the sword!

For your fierce dealings will call forth avenging wrath (from God),

That ye may know there is a judgment."¹

But theological zeal was as hard to restrain in ancient as in modern times. Zophar thinks it his duty to be more severe than ever, and takes up the discourse again by a fervent repetition of the doctrine Job has so often repudiated. A sinner, says he, may flourish for a time, but so much the more terrible and hopeless will be his destruction in the end. The triumph of the wicked, he tells Job, is short; the joy of the impious only for a moment. Has not experience taught this from of old, since ever man was set on the earth? The heavens shall one day reveal guilt, and the earth rise up against the wicked. All the gain of his house shall depart, carried away by the flood of God's anger, in the day of His wrath. This is the portion of a wicked man from Elohim, and the lot appointed him by God.

But Job had an answer ready, which turns all that has been said to his own favour. That men should have held that the godless flourish in this life, speaks for his own innocence, not against him! It is true enough that the wicked are often prosperous, but it is also no less true that the pious and upright are often the reverse. If his friends think guilt always meets its punishment here, others think the very opposite. All, in fact, is confusion and darkness in this life, in the ways of God to man. He has for a time forgotten his faith in the correction of all inequalities of time in the world beyond, and, excited by so much disputing, can think only of the mystery of life, so dark and impenetrable. "His friends have acted wrongly by

¹ Zöckler.

him. They have kept back half of the truth to crush him, by presenting only what favours themselves." Once more Job has fallen into the snare of distrusting God, as if He could in any case act unrighteously.

For the second time the sufferer, when he seemed like to be silenced by the speeches of his friends, had become, in an unexpected way, the assailant, forcing them to own themselves worsted, or to change their ground. They cannot deny the fact which Job has urged, that life is a mystery, and that misfortune is not always restricted to the wicked; but they shirk entering further on such doubtful questions, though they cannot restrain their astonishment at such a pertinacious refusal to listen to their warnings, and such a resolute self-vindication.

But they have no longer their early confidence; they henceforth show that they are fighting a lost battle. Their first and keenest weapons, which they used with a good conscience against Job, are gone. Their warnings not to speak against God and His righteousness have been turned against themselves, and nothing is left but to sink from the dignity of lofty statements of God's ways to the littleness of personal charges. They had hitherto been ashamed to specify accusations, but are now forced to reproach him with definite gross sins which he had committed before his days of sorrow. They feel sure it must have been so; though, of course, they cannot prove it!

But, now, as the fire is dying out, it leaps up from its ashes. Eliphaz is, this time, the speaker. "Would God," he asks, "chasten thee for fearing Him, or bring thee thus to judgment (if thou wert blameless)? Is not thy wickedness great, and are not thy sins infinite?" He then proceeds to charge him with every form of

unworthiness. "He has taken a pledge from his brother man without cause; he has stripped the naked of their clothing; he has refused water to the thirsty, and withheld food from the hungry; he has sent the widows empty away, and has broken the arms of the fatherless. 'And now,' he virtually says, 'how doth God know? Can He judge through the thick cloud?'"

He then, once more, appeals to Job if sinners are not always in the end destroyed in this life? He cannot tear himself from his belief that it is so, and triumphantly asks if the godly are not always able, sooner or later, to say, "In very deed our adversaries are destroyed; the fire has consumed their possessions." But if Job will only confess his sins and repent; if he put away iniquity far from his tents, he will, ere long, lay up gold as dust, and the treasures of Ophir, from the beds of the streams!

Job had no heart to retort and justify himself against charges which he felt so unfounded, and continued his former thoughts of the mysteriousness of God's ways, rather in soliloquy than spoken to those round him. His whole soul yearns for an open decision of his cause by God. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" he cries out, "that I might come even to His seat!" But he despairs of such a deliverance. God will not appear to solve the momentous question. It seems as if He had designedly withdrawn, that He might leave the mystery unexplained. But the very fact that He thus veils Himself, and keeps silence, is itself mysterious. He carries out His will with no revelation of the dark questions which its apparent contradictions raise.

"Behold," says he, "I go forward—He is not there;
Backwards—I see Him not;

If He hide on my left hand—I cannot perceive Him :
If on my right—I fail to behold Him !

* * * * *

My foot kept His steps ;
I held His way, not turning aside ;
I did not forsake the command of His mouth ;
I kept His word as my law !”

Yet, how—he leaves it to be added—has he suffered ! All is darkness ! But that very darkness convicts his friends of presumption in accusing him as they have done.

Job has thus involved his reprovers in a difficulty from which they could not escape, and as, besides, he will not condescend to answer their specific accusations, they have virtually no more to add. But Bildad must say something. He cannot follow up the personal attack of Eliphaz, for Job has slighted it, nor can he take the same old line of argument, for he must first answer the difficulty Job has raised. He can only, therefore, fall back on what has been said before, and repeat some vague generalities which no one can dispute—that the contrast between God and man is infinite, and that as the moon in its brightness seems dark before Him, and the very stars do not shine in His presence, surely mortal man, the creeping thing, and the son of man, the worm, should be silent before Him !

Job had hitherto waited till the third friend had spoken, before he turned on them, but now, feeling how empty the last speech has been, he breaks out into bitter irony ; and then, as Bildad has essayed to speak of the greatness of God, overwhelms him and the others by uttering a far grander picture of it, which, of itself, shows how idle their discourse had been to one who

knows so much more, and can speak so much better than themselves.

The friends were at last silenced, and now Job addresses them as they stand beaten before him. Once more he repeats his consciousness of innocence, but with it he joins his unshaken trust in God even in his deepest misery. He cannot believe in the abiding prosperity of the wicked any more than they, but feels that it must end in terrible ruin. But the mystery of God's ways can only be solved by that real wisdom which alone secures true earthly happiness, and explains the difficulties of the Divine dispensations ; and this can be had only from God, by pious submission to Him.

The last part of the book commences with a discourse by Job, in which he shows that, as his sufferings are not due to his sins, they must have a deeper source. He paints his former prosperity, and traces it to his uprightness and gracious use of the benefits he enjoyed. He had once had universal respect and far-reaching influence, but now men despised him. Misery of all kinds oppressed him: all his hopes had been disappointed. Yet he had given himself up in his happy days to no evil passion; he had ruled his house worthily; he had shown kindness to all, and uprightness as a citizen, and had not neglected the rarer duties to God and man. He had been no hypocrite, and had not been guilty of secret violence or oppression. Why, then, he suffered as he did, God alone could explain.

A new speaker, Elihu, now appears, and while in some respects at one with the others, shows a clearer insight. Justifying the Divine righteousness, he accounts for a man like Job not reaping the reward of his goodness in some cases, by his shortcomings and rash speeches against God. Sufferings are generous chas-

tisements, to make man better, and such especially have been those of Job. Even nature itself may teach us confidence in the righteousness of God.

The book closes by the entrance of God Himself, through His heavenly voice, on the scene. The lessons of nature are urged as sufficient ground for confidence in the Divine righteousness, and Job is reproved for having spoken thoughtlessly. The infinite power and wisdom of the Holy One is proclaimed, and Job, humbled and conscious of the guilt and folly of his murmurings, casts himself on the mercy of his Creator. To trust where we do not see; to believe that all is well ordered, and that, hereafter, if not here, the mysteries of life will be fully solved, is, he now feels, the spirit in which to meet the dispensations of Providence.

The end of the wondrous drama is striking. The three friends are sharply reproved for their assaults on Job, while his lowly abasement before God has brought a vindication of his uprightness, and a final condemnation of their cherished belief that suffering is the punishment of particular sins. Job is reinstated in more than his former prosperity, and the lesson taught to all ages, that it becomes man to bow in all things before the sovereign will of God, with the firm assurance that what we know not now we shall know hereafter.





JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH, the second of the four so-called Great Prophets, is the most striking figure in the last age of the kingdom of Judah, which he survived, to mourn over the ruins of Jerusalem with a tenderness and pathos associating him for ever with its calamity. His very name—Jeremiah—"The Lord casts down"—is a memento at once of his times and of his character.

He was the son of Hilkiah,—“The specially devoted to God,”—a priest, living in the upland village of Anathoth,—The place of “answers” to prayer,—about an hour north-east of Jerusalem, and here he spent his earlier life; himself, by birth, a priest.

It was a time of the swift decay and breaking up of Judah. The two great powers east and west of Palestine, Babylon and Egypt, were in mortal struggle which involved Judah in their disasters, and finally blotted out what still remained of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. Nor was there unity and peace even in the narrow bounds of Judah. A fierce party-strife raged between the favourers of foreign idolatry and those who were still faithful to the worship of Jehovah.

Yet, from the midst of trouble and moral and political decay, were slowly rising the elements of a happier future. A new life was destined to spring from the

ruin of the State, and of this Jeremiah was the chosen herald. While on the one hand fearlessly announcing the Divine wrath at the sins of his people, he stands in sublime dignity as the prophet who laid the foundation of the spiritual regeneration of his nation by word and writings. From the ruins on which he sat in tears, he looked forward to coming days, in which Jehovah would make a new and higher covenant with His people than that of Moses—a covenant in spirit and in truth.

Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah was a man apparently little fitted to breast and guide such evil times. Shrinking, sensitive, and inclined to retirement, he would, seemingly, have preferred to live quietly in Anathoth, mourning over the sad state of things. But the Highest had chosen him as His messenger to His people, and at this supreme command all hesitation was forgotten. The weakness of natural temperament was forthwith lost in a grand devotion to duty.

He began his prophetic work early in life, for we find him acting as a recognized prophet in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (B.C. 629). The young king had begun his great Reformation, which was destined to be so short-lived, and Assyria was on the eve of its fall (B.C. 606). It seemed as if the evil days of the past were over, when the great idolatrous power before which Judah had trembled was tottering to its destruction, and a king, zealous for Jehovah, was restoring His worship in Israel. But these hopes were doomed to disappointment. In the place of Assyria there rose, forthwith, the terrible might of the Chaldeans, and the change Josiah had made for the better was like the early dew, and the morning cloud that passeth away.

The first scene of Jeremiah's activity was his native village, but ere long he removed to Jerusalem, and

there, for the next forty years, we find him unrestingly faithful to his work—now in the Temple, now at the gates of the city, or from a prison, or in the king's house, or by recording his words in writing. Twenty-two years of his public life passed without any marked incidents that have come down to us, only brief traces remaining of the discourses delivered in them. For eighteen years he had the delight of seeing the good Josiah directing public affairs, for it was not till so long after he had begun his career as prophet that that hero-saint fell in the terrible defeat of Megiddo (B.C. 610). No greater national calamity could have happened. Prophets and people were alike overwhelmed. The singing-men and singing-women, says the Book of Chronicles, bewailed Josiah in their songs of lament, which they sang on the recurrence of the fatal day, and such laments became a custom in Israel. Jeremiah, more than most, must have felt all that the disaster implied, and he, like others, lamented for the fallen glory of Judah; it may be in words like those which, in the Lamentations, he used of Zedekiah, the last king on the throne of David:

“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Jehovah
Was taken in their pits—
Of whom we said,
‘Under his shadow will we live among the heathen.’”¹

Five years later came the great battle at Carchemish, on the Euphrates, in which Egypt lost her short-lived superiority, and the name of Babylon, now under the great Nebuchadnezzar, was in the mouth of all men as a new and awful power destined to take the place of both Egypt and Assyria in Western Asia. Judah forth-

¹ Lam. iv, 20.

with passed under the yoke of the terrible Chaldean, and this carried with it the future captivity of the nation. Jeremiah had long before predicted the overthrow of the theocracy by a people coming from the north, but he had not named it. Now, however, in the utterance which is contained in the twenty-fifth chapter of his prophecies, he for the first time turned the eyes and thoughts of the people to the Chaldeans, by name, as the future scourge in the hand of God.

It had fared ill with the land in the five years since the death of Josiah. Jehoahaz, one of his sons, a youth of three-and-twenty, had been set by the people on the throne in his father's stead; but the fact that he was the chosen of the nation was itself enough to make Pharaoh at once set him aside. The land was already a mere tributary province of Egypt, and a puppet king was easily found in another son of Josiah, who reigned under the name of Jehoiakim. Five years a vassal of Egypt, Judah found herself next transferred to Nebuchadnezzar, and the ominous change was at once made by Jeremiah the burden of his public warnings and exhortations. The burden did not indeed fall on the land at once, for the Chaldeans could not invade Judah for four years after his triumph. Then, however, the yoke was laid on its neck once more.

The position now taken by Jeremiah was peculiar, and must have been hard to accept on the part of his countrymen. From the moment of Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Egypt,—although four years passed before he came to claim submission from Judah and the lands round it,—the prophet openly and continuously counselled that submission was the one condition of even partial safety. The burden of his preaching, day by day, was, in effect, that because the dwellers in Jeru-

saalem had turned a deaf ear to all he had said as a prophet, for twenty years, in their midst, God would give them into the hand of the king of Babylon. Nor would they, only, fall under his sway. Egypt also; Uz; the land of the Philistines and of the Phenicians; Edom, Moab, Ammon; the Arab tribes; the Elamites and the Medes, must bow before him. Opposition to this awful agent of God's judgments would be of no avail. The only escape from utter destruction was willing and prompt subjection. Those who thus yielded to him would at least remain in their country. All the nations the seer had named would serve Babylon seventy years, but after that its king himself would be judged, and Israel would be freed from his yoke.

Dating from the year of Carchemish to that of the Return from Captivity, the interval is seventy years almost exactly.¹ Indeed, if we include the one or the other, the fulfilment of the prediction is literal!

But not only did Jeremiah insist on this in words; from the time of the fatal battle he even committed it carefully to writing, that his people should hereafter have evidence of the truth of his warnings and promises. Collecting his various utterances into a series, he caused them to be engrossed and preserved; if, perchance, so solemn an act might at last touch the hard hearts of his race. But their obduracy and perverted natures withstood even this final appeal.

Four years, only, passed before the warning predictions of the seer began to be fulfilled. The dreadful Nebuchadnezzar appeared, and Jehoiakim at once became his vassal. Left on the throne, the unhappy shadow-king died seven years later, amidst troubles on every hand, for Judah was harried on all sides by

¹ B.C. 605—535 = 70.

Chaldeans, Syrians, and the smaller nations round, and he was helpless to resist them. His son, Jehoiachin, refused to submit to Babylon, but had reigned only three months when Nebuchadnezzar appeared with his army, and after besieging Jerusalem, began the final destruction of the kingdom, by carrying off to Babylon all the treasures of the Temple and the palace, and ten thousand of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including all the princes and leading military men, all the smiths and other craftsmen who might be used against him, and Jehoiachin himself, his mother, his harem, his eunuchs, and his courtiers.

Jeremiah's words were being sadly fulfilled!

He had been exposed to great personal danger ever since he had first advised submission to Babylon, from the popular indignation at his unwelcome counsels. Under Jehoiakim, indeed, he had had to brave the hostility of both king and court, as well as of the people, but though the fierce rage of the king once led him to cut in pieces a copy of the hated predictions for which he had asked, nothing was done against the prophet himself. Days of more bitter trial, however, were now approaching.

Nebuchadnezzar had carried out, in the case of Judah, the Oriental plan of weakening states so as to render them powerless to rebel, and now took the further step, after displacing Jehoiachin, the grandson of Josiah, of setting up as titular king his uncle Zedekiah, Josiah's son. The fallen monarch, meantime, was led in chains to Babylon, and only regained his freedom in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's successor; ending his days in the pleasant contrast of royal favour at the Babylonian court.

The position of Jeremiah under Zedekiah grew more

and more trying, as the irreligion and hardened perversity of the people and their leaders became worse and worse. He still promised them favour from God if they repented, and some small beginnings of reform showed themselves, but they were only superficial and passing. Zedekiah ere long broke the oath of fidelity he had taken to Nebuchadnezzar, and brought another invasion of the Babylonian army on himself in the ninth year of his reign. The vain hope of aid from Egypt had tempted him to this course, but that aid did not arrive till Jerusalem was being besieged. The march of the besiegers to meet this Egyptian diversion raised deceptive hopes in the citizens, but Jeremiah fearlessly exposed their worthlessness.

From this time persecution was the lot of the prophet, putting him in continual danger of death, and heaping upon him every form of suffering. A pretext was found for throwing him into prison, which he did not leave till the town was taken; and what an Eastern prison is even to-day may help us to judge what it must have been 2,500 years ago.

The weak king saw himself, indeed, forced to consult the despised and hated prophet again and again, but he had not enough decision of character to brave his courtiers, who were embittered to the uttermost against one who had so sternly attacked the corruptions of their order.

Yet nothing could bend the martyr from his integrity. As in the days of his freedom, he still proclaimed that the city must yield to Babylon, and that only he would save his life who freely submitted. His enemies were furious at such obstinacy, and though they feared to kill him, added to his sufferings by causing him to be cast into an empty water cistern, the

bottom of which was deep with mud. In this extremity, however, a friend appeared, in the person of one of the royal eunuchs, at whose intercession he was removed from this terrible dungeon. He had shown his heroic and saintly spirit more brightly at this darkest moment of his life than ever before, for it was now that he dictated his most glowing predictions of the future grandeur of the restored theocracy, when the "Branch of Righteousness—the Messiah, to come—would reign in judgment and righteousness." Even at this moment, also, when all seemed lost to him in life, he showed his absolute confidence of a prosperous future to his native land by buying a field in Anathoth at the price at which it would have been sold in favourable times, and causing the title-deed to be laid up, as a witness in after days that he had never despaired of his country.

After a two years' siege Jerusalem once more fell, and with its capture came Jeremiah's release. The final ruin of the city followed. The Temple was burned down; the walls of the city levelled; all the chief buildings destroyed; and the whole place sacked, to the last procurable plunder worth bearing off. The sons of Zedekiah were killed before their father's eyes, and he himself was then blinded and led off to Babylon in chains. Only the poorer classes, who could give no trouble, were left in the land; all others were carried into captivity.

Among those allowed to remain was Jeremiah, who betook himself to the court of Gedaliah, the Pasha appointed over the country by Nebuchadnezzar. Before long, however, this dignitary was murdered, and the people, terrified at the expected vengeance of the Babylonish court, determined in large numbers to emigrate to Egypt. With these exiles Jeremiah was

forced to cast in his lot, though he had opposed the abandonment of Judæa with all his earnestness. But they took him with them by force. The fulfilment of his predictions had at last surrounded him with a halo



JEWISH CAPTIVES, FROM THE ASSYRIAN SCULPTURES AT KHORSABAD

of reverence, and it was felt as if the community had a pledge of the presence of God Himself in that of His recognized servant.

The emigrants settled at Tahpanhes, in Lower Egypt,

and there Jeremiah continued his mission. Not only his Jewish fellow exiles, who still continued ungodly and impenitent, but even Egypt itself, listened to solemn warnings of approaching doom from the lips of the fearless messenger of Jehovah.¹

From this date we have only legends to cast an uncertain light on his remaining days. He is said to have been stoned to death at last by his fellow-countrymen, in their fury at his constant rebukes of their sin, and anticipations of calamity as its punishment.

By a natural reaction the prophet was speedily as much honoured when dead as he had been despised and evil treated when alive. His prophecies, which held out the return from captivity, became the special study of the better disposed of his people in their exile. By a steady revulsion from past misappreciation he gradually rose in the popular imagination to an almost superhuman greatness. His appearance was said to have been more than mortal, and a multitude of wonderful legends were invented to do him honour. In the end, indeed, he came to be thought by his nation so incomparably the greatest of the prophets that they spoke of him as *the prophet*, and believed that he would reappear before the advent of the Messiah as the precursor mentioned by Moses. Even in the New Testament we find traces of this in the speculations of the people respecting Jesus. Not a few of them fancied He was no other than Jeremiah, returned to earth from heaven, to inaugurate the new Kingdom of God.

¹ Jer. xliii. 8-13; xliv.





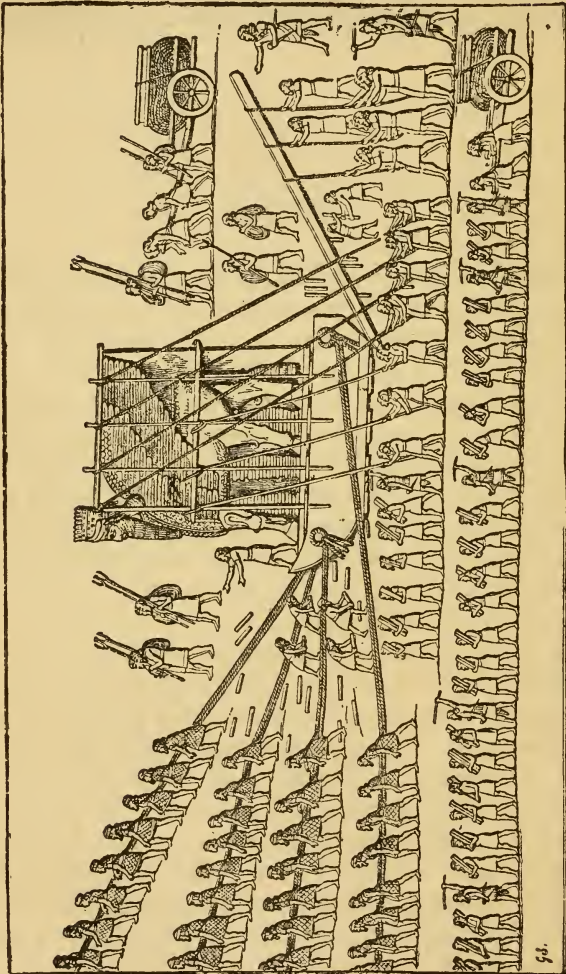
EZEKIEL.

JUDAH had sunk rapidly, in its last years, towards its final ruin. The thunder-like denunciations of its prophets had sounded vainly in the closed ears of its corrupt and idolatrous population, and of its weak and unworthy kings. The blow that had at last fallen, and the long trains of captives wending towards the Euphrates proclaimed that, for a season, Babylon, rather than the land that God had given them, was to be the home of the nation. Ezekiel was the prophet to whom the mission was given to accompany them in their exile, and to win back their hearts, in the day of their trial, to the God of their fathers.

The name of the prophet Ezekiel—"Him whom God strengthens"—was itself a light to his people in these dark and painful times. The son of a priest—like his contemporaries, Jeremiah and Zechariah—he had a double reverence in the eyes of his countrymen as, himself, by birth, one of the sacred order.

The first bands of captives, including King Jehoiachin and the chief men of Judah, found Ezekiel in their number. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered them to be led away to Babylon, and there the prophet found a home on the banks of the "river Chebar," which was one of

the countless broad canals of irrigation that led from the Euphrates, in the province of Babylon.



STATE SLAVES IN ASSYRIA DRAGGING A HUGE SCULPTURE TO ITS DESTINED SITE. IN ILLUSTRATION OF THE LABOURS IMPOSED ON THE JEWS DURING THEIR CAPTIVITY.

It must have been a rich, sunny land, for the very name of the spot where Ezekiel had his home was the familiar one of "The hill of corn,"—that is, Cornhill,—not, indeed, a hill in any special sense, but rather a rise in the wide fertile plain that stretched like a calm sea on every side.

Babylon was, in all physical respects, a far better home than Judæa. The soil, everywhere well watered by numberless canals and rivulets from the Euphrates, was amazingly fertile. Wheat and barley grew rank in height and some fingers broad in the blade, and dates abounded. Trees, in general, and stone for building, were scarce, as in Assyria, so that the houses may have stood exposed to the sun in great measure, as in Egypt now. Built only of large sun-dried bricks, they have long since mouldered into the dust from which they were made. Yet we must not conclude too hastily from the charactersitics of waterless portions, that those on the canals or "rivers," were unshaded by luxuriant growths of vines and fruit trees, for where wheat grew so richly, other things also would own the power of irrigation.

In such an earthly paradise Ezekiel had his new home, and here he married and gathered round him the cares and comforts of a household. It was in the fifth year after he had been led away that he received the summons to his high prophetic office. If we may trust Josephus, he was still young,¹ and must thus have interested himself early in the things of religion. Is it too much to think that he had learned to fear God in his father's house? for the very name, Buzi, which his father bore,—“The despised one,”—may well hint of

¹ Ant. x. 6, 3.

fidelity to the God of Abraham, which only brought derision on him in those evil days.

How long Ezekiel's ministrations continued is not told us, but they extended at least over twenty-three years, the last date in his book being the twenty-seventh of his exile—the sixteenth after Jerusalem itself perished.

Unlike Jeremiah, he gives us very few personal details. In keeping with his birth and priestly office,—now, since the Temple had fallen, only a painful remembrance of the past,—he seems to have been a careful and earnest student. His writings, indeed, show that he devoted himself to the study of the sacred books of his people more than any other prophet either after the exile or before it. Allusions to Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, and a series of references to details of the Law, as stated in the Pentateuch generally, are found in various parts of his writings. Nor was the earliest Hebrew literature his only study. Hosea and Isaiah lend him conceptions, and he was evidently familiar with the written predictions of his contemporary Jeremiah.

His position is unique in the history of the prophets. Jeremiah had witnessed for God in times of national decline and corruption, but the nation was still in its own land. But Ezekiel was far from Palestine, in which alone the prophets had hitherto appeared. That he should have been so was the hope of his people, for he thus became a centre round which those could gather who were at last, under the pressure of trouble, inclined to return to Jehovah. His words became the seed of a religious revival, which, two generations later, resulted in the return, and, through that, to the whole future development of the spiritual kingdom of God.

The summons to his office was in keeping with the

circumstances of his race. Isaiah had once seen Jehovah, in vision, in the temple of the heavens, but the vision was granted in Judah, and its characteristics pointed to a temple at Jerusalem as the centre, where alone earthly manifestations of God were to be expected. The exiles might have thought with Jacob, that, with the sacred soil where they had been wont to have access to the Creator, they had left His presence behind. But when the Divine Majesty appeared to Ezekiel on the banks of the Chebar, in the land of the heathen, it showed that if God had left His local sanctuary at Jerusalem He was still with His people, and that, even without a temple, He was as accessible as when He sat between the Cherubim. Hitherto, priestly services had been required, and a local Presence alone vouchsafed, but now a direct revelation was granted, with no intervention of rites or sacrifice, and no consecration of a sacred spot. The world was proclaimed one great temple, and God Himself announced that, henceforth, He would be a sanctuary to His people.

It is not a little noteworthy that it was precisely from the date of the overthrow of priestly rites and temple service, and the substitution of spiritual worship and continuous religious instruction, that religion revived. Ezekiel was the true forerunner of Ezra, whom we have to honour as the distinctive founder of preaching, at fixed times, week after week, in connection with the synagogue; and it is not too much to say, that the synagogue has been the strength and very life of Judaism from his day till now. Even under the Ancient Economy it was not by ceremonies and rites that religion was maintained and spread; under these they withered and died. The spiritual life of Israel dates from the introduction of direct religious instruc-

tion by Ezekiel, when the Temple had perished, when Israel was far even from its ruins, and the priest's occupation utterly gone.

We have glimpses of the prophet's activity in his writings. The "elders of the people" come from time to time to his house, to receive instruction from him,¹ for even in captivity the nation retained its ancestral organization and order. But not only the leaders thus "sat before him:" the people as a body waited on his instructions.² True, he had to bewail the hardness of the majority: to sigh over their praise of his words and their failure to act on them, but still they came. It had not been so in Judæa. Isaiah had not waited till the king summoned him, but had gone out to the Fuller's Field to meet him. He had sought the Treasurer Shebna, and announced to his own face his approaching fall.³ Jeremiah had stood at the gates of the city, or in the streets, denouncing the sins of his people and predicting their speedy punishment; he had even gone up to the courts of the Temple to do so. But Ezekiel remained in his own house, and let all who sought comfort or good come to him. He was, perhaps unconsciously, acting as a transition from the age of mere earnest speech, to that of calm and stated instruction, in assemblies for the purpose.

His course did not, however, run smoothly. In the first years of the exile, before Jerusalem perished, his countrymen still clung to the hope that it would yet be delivered. To add to his difficulties, false prophets flattered the people by "seeing visions of peace for her," when God had said there was none.⁴ Even women,⁵ for the poor reward of trifling payments, took

¹ Ezek. viii. 1; xiv. 1; xx. 1.

² Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

³ Isa. vii. 3; xxii. 15.

⁴ Ezek. xiii. 16.

⁵ Ezek. xiii. 18.

up the trade of foretelling whatever might flatter the general taste, and it seemed for a time as if Ezekiel was to be foiled by the rivalry, though he denounced it with all earnestness, and renewed continually his predictions against Jerusalem, the Temple, and the remnant of the people left in Judæa.

Five or six years passed, from his first call as a Prophet, in this wearying and disappointing controversy with impostors, and in a struggle against the hardness of heart of his countrymen. The fall of Jerusalem, however, the burning of the Temple, and the final carrying off of Judah, at last vindicated Ezekiel; at once dissipating all illusions and confirming his reputation. It is a striking fact, as perhaps illustrative of the future success of his mission, that Israel, which from the first had always inclined to heathenism, now at last, for ever repudiated all idolatrous rites and customs, and became sternly fixed in their abhorrence of everything connected with them. The fires that had consumed the sanctuary at Jerusalem, in conjunction with the labours of Ezekiel and others like him, purified the nation from its religious apostasy. Henceforth there might be carelessness in the service of Jehovah, but there was no rivalry between Him and false gods.

But though the seer had the joy of seeing idolatry for ever cast away, there was much to regret in the superficial reform which effected this. An intolerable pride arose, which trusted in its orthodoxy, and a self-righteousness which found in mere external observances its whole idea of religion. The Prophet had to speak of his contemporaries as those who had eyes, but were blind; and had ears, but were deaf;¹ and to denounce their hearts as of stone,² for which a heart of flesh

¹ Ezek. xii. 2.

² Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

must be substituted. The legal purifications of the law were not enough: there must be pure life. A high morality which had in it the germ of national regeneration was demanded.

The peculiarity of Ezekiel's leaving the people to come to his teaching was apparently the result of his special mental constitution. Other prophets identified themselves in the closest and more lively way with public life, and were direct in most of their utterances; but in his case, there was a fondness for a special and individual mode of thought and expression. Inclined to look for outward help from the writings of his sacred predecessors, his very doing so showed a want of that originality of mind that marks Isaiah. His visions are themselves largely borrowed, at least in conception, from already existing hints or facts. His inaugural vision, or that of the Cherubim, and that of the future temple, are evidently borrowed, at least in part, from the types supplied by Isaiah in his vision of Jehovah, the description of the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the colossal winged figures with which Babylon made him familiar.

The collected prophecies of Ezekiel form a whole of forty-eight chapters, of which the first twenty-four contain oracles of an earlier date than the destruction of Jerusalem. The second half, exclusive of prophecies respecting foreign peoples, speak only respecting Israel after Jerusalem had perished.

The narrative of the prophet's call and consecration is given in the first three chapters. "The hand of the Lord," he tells us, "was upon him," by the river Chebar, and he saw, in a fiery cloud which rolled towards him from the north, the form of four wondrous creatures, with, each, four wings, and the faces of a man, an

eagle, an ox, and a lion; ideals which ally themselves naturally with the Cherubim of the Holy of Holies. Forthwith, they moved forward on four wheels, while above them there appeared a wide firmament; and above the firmament, a sapphire throne, over which was seen the glory of the Almighty, who bore a human form, and was surrounded by awful splendours of light and flame.

Overpowered by such a sight, the prophet hears the voice of God, and, recalled to consciousness, receives from Him the commission to preach to the rebellious people of his race. This awful vision was afterwards repeated at another place, and constituted Ezekiel's solemn designation to his office.

A prophecy of the approaching judgments on Judah follows. Jerusalem is to be besieged and fall, and the wrath is to strike not only the great but even the humble of the land. The first section concludes, after a terrible picture of the utter corruption of the inhabitants of the Holy City, with the relation of another vision of God, confirming all the earlier threatenings against them.

A second series of prophetic discourses is now given. They date in the fifth year before the fall of Jerusalem, when the news of the intended revolt of Zedekiah may have already reached the Chebar, and filled the exiles with the hope of a speedy return to their beloved native land. Ezekiel cannot confirm these expectations. The fate of the capital is inevitable. Zedekiah is only hastening and embittering the inevitable result, and will himself go into captivity. Neither should they be misled by the words of false prophets, nor by the idea that, for the sake of the good men in their number, they will escape the evil. Jerusalem is rejected,

like a useless piece of the crooked knotty wood of the vine, and the people cast aside as a woman who has fallen into shameless sin. The Chaldeans—God's sword—will march against Judah and Ammon to carry out the Divine vengeance.

In his last chapters, the prophet turns to the consideration of the possibility and mode of the restoration of the theocracy, which, ere this, had perished with the destruction of the Temple. A true shepherd must warn his flock of danger, and lead them to safety, else he himself will be judged of God. Former shepherds of Israel had led it astray, but God would demand a reckoning from them. He, Himself, would henceforth be Israel's shepherd, and under Him His servant David—the name for the Messiah, now clearly foretold—would reign in Jerusalem. The Holy Land is to be inhabited anew: prosperity to be universal, but only through purification and renewing of the whole moral being of the nation, and through a lasting abandonment of the ways in which Israel had hitherto walked. This grand future seems to Ezekiel like the waking of the dead. The tribes of Israel will once more unite in Zion under the king appointed by God. The heathen world will rise against them, but will be destroyed, and Israel will then dwell securely in its own land.

Nothing now stands in the way of the erection of the new theocracy, and with the minute description of its services and constitution the Book closes. The new Temple is described in its least detail, with the ordinances of its worship.

In all this there can only be seen the symbolic anticipation of the Messianic times delivered in a way suited to those to whom Ezekiel addressed himself. We now know that such visions are only to be understood in a

spiritual sense, but, in that, we are certain they will one day be fulfilled.

In Chapter xxxiv. the death of the prophet's wife is narrated, but nowhere is there any mention of his own decease, either in the prophecies or in the Bible at large. We only know that the death of His saints is precious in the sight of the Lord, and that the faithful servant did not pass to his reward till he had finished the work given him to do.



ANCIENT EGYPTIAN WINGED FORM.—Wilkinson.



DANIEL.

THE name Daniel, which means, "The judge who speaks for God," is borne by three personages in the Old Testament records: by a son of David,¹ a Levite of the house of Ithamar, and by the great prophet whose book forms part of the sacred canon.

Daniel seems to have been of royal, or, at least, noble birth, for he is first mentioned among the "children of the king's seed, and of the princes" of Israel.² He was, apparently, born in Jerusalem, and must have been carried off to Babylon while still very young, in the first bands of captives under Jehoiachin.

A striking illustration of the fact that there are always some, even in the darkest days, who are better than their times, is seen in the character not only of Daniel, from his earliest years, but in that of three of his companions carried off with him. The youth in Jerusalem in these evil years grew up amidst the sight of the abominations of idolatry practised within the very precincts of the Temple, incense offered to "abominable beasts;" women weeping for Thammuz,—that is, celebrating a heathen festival for the supposed object of the love of Venus, who was fabled to have been killed by a boar—a feast accompanied with all the

¹ 1 Chron. iii. 1.

² Dan. i. 3.

excesses of sensual impurity ;—men, in the inner court of the Temple, “with their backs towards the temple of the Lord,” worshipping “the sun towards the east.”¹ Nor was the gross idolatry of the king, Jehoiakim, his only sin. He put his nobles in chains,² threw Jeremiah into a dungeon, and cut up and burned the written prediction of that prophet at the moment when a national fast was being celebrated. But his gross idolatry, reckless impiety, and cruel tyranny were equalled by his selfishness, for when the land had been impoverished by the heavy tribute paid successively to Egypt and Babylon, he squandered large sums in building luxurious palaces for himself.

(Yet in the midst of such corruption and wickedness we find among the youths or children carried off along with Jehoiachin, not only one like Daniel, but others of the same spirit, like his boy companions, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah. They could not, moreover, have been alone, but speak of a leaven true to the faith of their fathers, from whom, two generations later, were to rise the Pilgrim Fathers of the Return.

The first notice we have of Daniel is in connection with a sagacious wish on the part of Nebuchadnezzar, the reigning king of Babylon, that a number of children of the royal and nobler families of Israel might be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Nothing could be better fitted to win over the leaders of the captive nation to loyalty to their new monarch, if only by the flattering prospect it offered of the advancement of their children to high posts of honour and emolument.

The requirements of those thus to be selected show Daniel to have been equally marked by physical beauty

¹ Jer. xix. and Ezek. viii.

² Esd. i. 38.

and intelligence, for only such were to be taken as were without blemish, well favoured, and had received a good education in the knowledge current among the people of the land. They were to be, in fact, future pashas and ministers, acting between the Chaldean court and their own race, and acceptable to both. Three years were to be devoted to the special training of the youths thus honoured, and at the end of that time they were to be advanced to the dignity of pages to the great king, to stand in his presence.

Among the favoured few were Daniel and the three youths already named, who henceforth, according to custom at the court of Babylon, were to bear the Chaldean names of Belteshazzar—"One whom Bel favours"—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—"The servant of Nego," a Babylonian idol. They were forthwith taken into the palace, put under the care of the chief eunuch; fed from the royal table, and, doubtless, assiduously instructed in all the Chaldean wisdom of the day.

The strictness of the Jewish principles of the youth Daniel was greatly shocked by this involuntary promotion. It was impossible for him to eat "unclean" food, and equally so to guard against this sin if he shared what had been prepared by idolatrous foreigners. Portions were, doubtless, offered from it to heathen gods, and there might be in it something forbidden by the law. The only safety lay in the use of none but vegetable food, and that, we may feel certain, made ready by Jews. Such scruples were fortunately respected, and after a trial of the effect of such diet on his health, the young Puritan carried his point. The simple food was found to produce better results than all the delicacies that could have been offered, and

water, as in all ages, was found a better tonic for the healthy than even the king's wine.

At the end of the three years' probation, the four young Jews, now duly fitted to stand before the king, were introduced to his presence at court. Daniel had not long been there, however, before an incident occurred which paved the way to far higher honours. Nebuchadnezzar had been troubled by a dream, which none of the learned Magi, or astrologers, or wonder-workers of the Chaldeans could interpret, and as in the case of Pharaoh of old, in similar circumstances, help was sought wherever it could be found. That they failed was, indeed, no wonder, for the king himself had forgotten his vision. But this was not allowed as an excuse, and, with the blind tyranny of an Oriental despot, an edict was published, that if the wise men failed to recall the whole to the royal memory, and to interpret it aright, they should be cut in pieces and their very houses pulled down.

Daniel and his companions, being ranked among the magicians thus proscribed, were now in imminent danger, for it was certain that no human ability could meet the king's demands. Arioeh, the officer appointed to the duty, was, in fact at once sent out by the furious tyrant to put the whole order to death, when Daniel met him, and having gone in to the king, craved time, and promised to meet his requirements.

Earnest prayer on the part of the young Jew and his companions followed, and was not left without an answer. "The secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision," and he caused himself to be once more brought before the king, and gave both the dream and its explanation so satisfactorily that he was made a great man, received many gifts, and was appointed ruler over the whole

province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of the land. Unwilling, however, to leave his companions in obscurity, he asked and obtained promotion for them also, though as a special distinction apartments were provided for himself in the palace.

But life in high places, under an Eastern monarchy, is always insecure. In a mad fit of caprice Nebuchadnezzar ordered a great golden idol to be erected in the wide plain near Babel, most probably in connection with a grand feast, to celebrate his own great deeds, and required that all the population of his kingdom should bow to it and pay it worship. It was, beforehand, certain that spirits such as those of Daniel and his friends, would not for a moment hesitate to disobey such an invasion of the rights of conscience. Others might kneel before an idol; they would rather die.

The discredited caste of the Magi, anxious in any way to compromise the foreigners, whom they hated as having supplanted them in royal favour,—though Daniel had, indeed, saved them from destruction,—were not slow to take advantage of this high-minded independence. Going before Nebuchadnezzar, they recounted the daring presumption that had preferred fidelity to the God of heaven before his command. It was enough. Nothing was too terrible to satisfy the wrath of the king. A fiery furnace was heated seven times hotter than usual, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, bound in their mantles, their hosen, their turbans, and other garments, were cast into its midst. But the king, in all his might, was powerless within the circle of the flames: it was taken possession of by Him whom the four served so faithfully, as part of His own dominions. To the horror of all, and especially of the king, they walked unhurt amongst the fire, and at their

side stood a form which Nebuchadnezzar could only describe as "like a Son of God." Even the despot's pride was humbled at a sight so august, and he learned for the moment a lesson of humility. Himself approaching the furnace, he summoned them to come forth, and they did so, untouched by its violence. No wonder that forthwith there went out an edict that "every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, should be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dung-hill; because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."

At a later time Daniel was enabled to offer an interpretation of another dream of the king which remained inexplicable to the Magi and their associated orders. Such a proof of wisdom could only have confirmed him in his dignities. This is the last incident narrated respecting Daniel in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The next introduces us to the last night of the reign of Belshazzar, and the eve of the fall of the Babylonish empire.

Trusting to the strength of his city walls, the king held a great feast, at which the sacred vessels, carried off from the Temple at Jerusalem, were brought out in reckless ostentation and defiance of Jehovah, whom it seemed as if Babylon had humbled, by having such vessels as trophies.

But in the midst of the revelry all was suddenly changed. The mysterious form of a man's hand was seen writing on the painted wall of the banqueting chamber words which no one could interpret. Once more Daniel was called in, and with grand fearlessness at once read them as, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin: God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it: thou

art weighed in the balances, and found wanting: thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

That night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took the kingdom.

The fame of Daniel procured him even greater honour under the new dynasty than he had enjoyed under the old. A hundred and twenty satraps governed the provinces, and under them were three high dignitaries, of whom Daniel was the first. That a foreigner and a captive should have such a place, and still more, that he should be held in supreme honour for his wisdom and parts, naturally excited the jealousy of the great ones of the empire, and another conspiracy was formed against him, on the ground of his faith.

Approaching Darius with the flattering but impious proposal that no one should ask any petition for thirty days from any god, but only from the king, under pain of being thrown to the lions, they seemed to have laid a plot into which Daniel and his friends must fall.

But whether they should perish or not was of small moment to men so sternly faithful to Jehovah. Opening his window towards Jerusalem, Daniel kneeled and prayed three times a day, as beforetime, and gave thanks to his God. Spies on the watch instantly reported him; and by the words of the decree, his destruction seemed certain. But the same God who delivered the three from the fires of the furnace shut the mouths of the lions, and saved the fourth when cast in among them. Innocency was unharmed even amongst savage beasts.

This is the last notice we have of Daniel. A building, said to be his tomb, is still shown on the banks of the Euphrates; but its only worth in connection with

him is as a proof of the reverence associated with his name. We are only told that he survived the aged Darius, and died under Cyrus the Persian, or rather, Elamite.



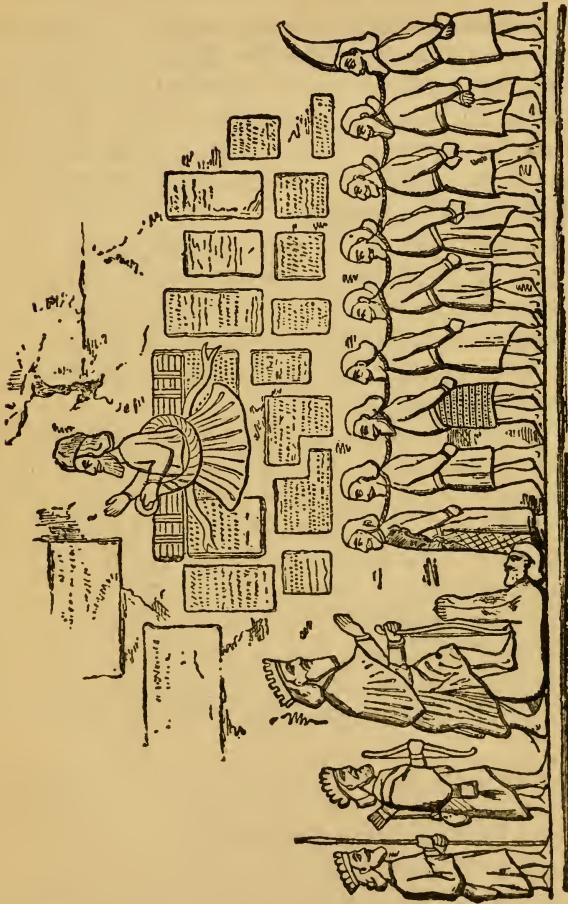


ESTHER.

BABYLON was taken by Cyrus in the year 538 before Christ, and the first band of Pilgrim Fathers was allowed to return to Jerusalem the year after. A great many Jews, however, chose to remain in the East,—indeed, the great majority of the nation,—and retained the purity of their descent, and their existence as a separate community so perfectly, that even in Palestine it was said, in after times, that the Jew of Babylon was as superior to his fellow Israelites of the Holy Land as the finest wheat to inferior. The captivity had transferred the race from a comparatively barren country to one of the richest in the world; and as the Jew at no time cared much for political liberty so long as he was permitted the exercise of his faith, the despotism of Persia pleased him, in quiet times, better than independence in Palestine could have done, by its offering worldly advantages and leaving his religious peculiarities undisturbed.

Cyrus died in the year B.C. 529, and was succeeded by his son Cambyses, who was too much engaged in war to interest himself in the affairs of Judæa. A five years' reign saw his career suddenly ended by an accidental wound from his own sword. An impostor next secured the throne for eight months, but having been

detected and put to death, Darius ascended it and held the power till his death, thirty-six years later. Under



DARIUS HYSTASPIS TREADING HIS ENEMIES UNDER FOOT. FROM THE BEHISTUN INSCRIPTION.

him the Persian monarchy extended from the Grecian Archipelago on the west, to the Indus on the east, and

included in its vast sweep Libya and Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Media, and the vast regions between the Indian Ocean, the Himalaya range, and the Caspian Sea—an empire ranging from east to west through fifty-five degrees, and nearly twenty from north to south. The reign of Darius is famous for the conquest of the Greek cities on the east coast of the Grecian Archipelago, which led, in the next reign, to the invasion of Europe and the glories of Marathon and Thermopylæ.

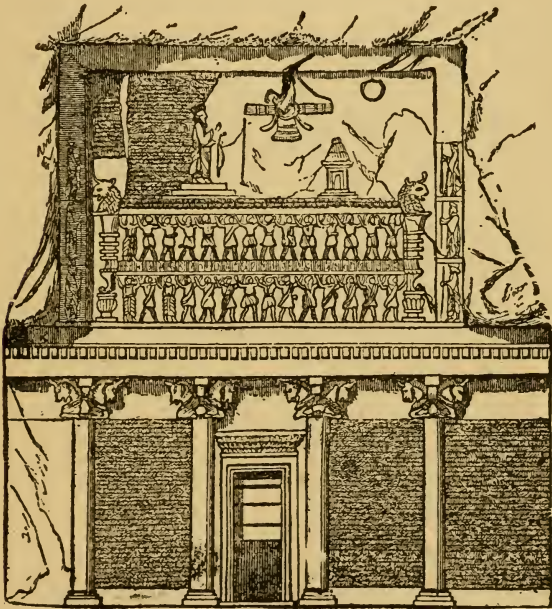
In the beginning of the year B.C. 486 Darius died, in the midst of preparations for war against Greece, and was succeeded by his son Xerxes, the Ahasuerus of the Bible, said to have been the tallest and handsomest man in his vast empire, but weak, capricious, cruel, and effeminate in character.

The Jews had already, in his reign, spread themselves east and west from Babylon, through all the hundred-and-twenty provinces under his rule, and, as has been the case in all ages, had found means of gaining influence and high position in not a few cases. Nearly seven hundred years after, Benjamin of Tudela found vast communities of his nation settled in every part of Ancient Persia, Media, and Mesopotamia, and we can easily fancy that their numbers were even greater in the prosperous times of their early settlement.

The capital of the empire of Xerxes was Shushan, or Susan,—“The Lily,”—on the banks of the Eulæus, or Ulai, which falls into the Persian Gulf.

Its ruins, after more than two thousand years, cover a space of about three miles in circumference, including four spacious artificial platforms above a hundred feet high, the site of once famous raised gardens and mag-

nificent palaces, one of which—doubtless that mentioned in Esther—was approached by a gigantic colonnade, with a frontage of 343 feet and a depth of 244. In the twenty years of the reign of Xerxes there might be rumours of the defeat at Marathon, five years before his accession, or of the humiliating flight at Salamis,



TOMBS OF DARIUS HYSTASPIS, AT PERSEPOLIS.

five years after it, but these troubles on the far-away borders of so vast a dominion, would affect Shushan as little as the news of a repulse in Bhootan or in the Malay Peninsula would move London.

Xerxes had not yet started for his inglorious campaign in Greece, but was in the full tide of preparation.

Troops had been gathered from every province of the empire, and it seemed as if a host greater than any drawn together in all history, before or since, must bring him an easy victory. Before he set off he proposed to signalize his departure by grand festivities. For six months, therefore, the great palace at Shushan was the scene of constant banqueting, as satraps and pashas from every part arrived with their troops, or attended for further instructions. Sitting high on his royal throne, in a hall blazing with gold, Xerxes "showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty" as the "king of kings."

The long reign of festivities to the princes and high dignitaries having at last closed, another, of seven days' length, was given in the royal gardens to the chief men of Shushan. Rich Babylonian tapestry of white and blue, the royal colours, and of endlessly varied patterns, were festooned from marble pillar to marble pillar of grand colonnades—the very rings that fastened them being of silver. The dining couches were of gold and silver, and stood on pavements of malachite, ivory, mother-of-pearl, and tortoise-shell; and the guests drank royal wine out of vessels of gold of different shapes and kinds.

The spirits and pride of Xerxes were at their height, and express commands were given that all might drink at their will; it may be for the king's success in his approaching campaign.

Persian queens commonly dined with their husbands, but at a time like this, the sultana, Vashti—"The best" or "The beauty"—had a separate feast for her own sex, that they too might be dazzled by the royal splendour. On the seventh day of the rejoicings, when the wine had risen to the head of Xerxes, the fancy

took him to show off his queen, unveiled, to the drunken revellers at his table, to his own loss of respect, and to the open slight of the queenly modesty and rank, for in Persia it was thought unbecoming for a queen to appear unveiled before men. Haughty in her pride of beauty, and conscious that Xerxes was hardly himself in giving such a command, she imprudently trusted to her fancied power over him, and when the eunuchs sent by him came to ask her to appear, she would not do so. Her husband might well have been pleased at the delicacy which shrank from unwomanly exposure, but the wine was in his brain, and in his rage he decreed her instant divorce.

Four years passed, during which he had been to Europe, and had returned defeated to Shushan, and there, in the weariness of his splendour, he began to think of Vashti, and the pleasure she had been to him. He had a harem large enough even for a Persian king, but there was no one of all its inmates like the lost "Beauty," and he fancied he should like just such a one in her place. Commands were, therefore, sent forth to all the provinces, in true despotic style, that the fairest girls anywhere known should be sent to Shushan for the king's inspection.

Among others who read the decree to this effect was Mordecai, a Benjamite Jew of Shushan, who had a niece,—Hadassah—"The myrtle,"—fair enough, he thought, to win the favour even of a king. He found means, therefore, to bring her to the head eunuch, in charge of the harem, and she commended herself so much to him that he made her at once his special care. Twelve months had to pass before she could be taken to the king—months passed in wearily perfecting her charms, and having then been introduced to Xerxes,

doubtless with the recommendation of the eunuch, she won all the favour Vashti had lost. She was no longer to be known by her former name, but was to be Esther,—“The star,”—and was to take the place of Vashti as the sultana.

Meanwhile, Mordecai found means to be of supreme use to the king, by revealing a conspiracy against his life, which Esther duly made known to him, though Mordecai still remained in the background, and his relationship to the sultana was unsuspected.

Among the attendants at court during these years, by a strange chance, was a descendant of the Emirs of Amalek, the sworn hereditary enemies of Israel. He had escaped from the slaughter of his race by Jewish bands, and had sought refuge at the palace of the great king, a common centre to which noble exiles were wont to flee in time of trouble. Haman—“The great one”—found favour with the king as he told his romantic story, and gradually won his way to the first place of honour at court. So high did he rise, indeed, that a special command was issued that all the king’s servants should prostrate themselves before him as he passed, in Eastern reverence.

One head, however, was noticed never to bow. It was of no use that Haman’s attendants strove to force the general homage in this particular case; and no wonder. It was the Jew Mordecai who refused it, for why should a Jew bow to an accursed Amalekite? Ere long Haman himself heard of it, and heard also that Mordecai was of the nation his soul hated—the nation that had all but extirpated his race. Scorning to strike so mean an enemy singly, Haman determined to try if it were not possible to use his influence to destroy the whole abhorred people at a blow.

Availing himself of an audience with Xerxes, he represented to him that there was a race of people in his dominions whose laws were different from those of the empire, and who slighted his commands in favour of their own customs. It was not seemly that such a spectacle of disobedience should be tolerated. If permission were given, he, Haman, would utterly destroy the worthless rebels, and would besides pay into the treasury ten thousand talents of silver, over a million and three quarter pounds sterling, from the plunder of their wealth. The bare mention of any people to whom his will was not in all things supreme, touched the tyrant to the quick. Refusing the silver, he hastily drew the signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, thus granting him full authority to do as he pleased with such a race.

Letters were instantly drawn up, and after being duly stamped with the royal seal, were sent off to every province of the empire, commanding a universal massacre of all Jews, of both sexes and all ages, on a given day; their property to be the spoil of their murderers. In Shushan alone, in Benjamin of Tudela's time, there were fourteen synagogues, and there were nearly 250,000 in the Mesopotamian provinces, after the persecutions and dispersions of seventeen centuries, so that the magnitude of the crime contemplated was appalling.

Mordecai soon heard what was intended, and having rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and wailed the coming ruin of his people. Consternation spread through all the Jewish families in the empire; their destruction seemed certain.

Esther, in the depths of the palace, presently heard, through her maids, of Mordecai's strange behaviour,

and before long was horrified at learning its cause. A friendly eunuch had learned from him the whole monstrous plot.

What was to be done? Esther had all the love of a Jewess for her people, but there was a standing law that no one could approach the king, except by his special command, on pain of death, unless he chose to hold out his golden sceptre to them as token of forgiveness, and she had not been summoned to appear before him for the last thirty days. It might be too late if she waited till she were called, and yet the prohibition to enter the presence unsummoned stood in all its force.

Her position was painful and difficult. On reflection she could not help seeing that her nationality would mark her as an especial victim, and she must have known the story of Haman and Mordecai, for it would be the gossip of the court. If she did nothing she must perish, and with her, her people, and the uncle she loved so well. Mordecai sent her word to this effect, and added, that "if she failed in her duty, others would be more courageous, but that she surely would die. Besides, might it not be that God had exalted her for just such a time as this?"

Esther's resolution was soon taken. "Tell Mordecai," said she, "to cause all the Jews in Shushan to fast three days and nights for me;" she and her maidens would do the same. Then she would brave it, and go into the king's presence, and if she died, she would die.

On the third day, having decked herself in her queenly robes, she ventured to approach the king, and to her delight he held out the sceptre, to invite her coming near. Asking her wish, he was told that she sought the honour of his presence and that of Haman,

that day at a banquet of wine. The request was forthwith granted, and when the hour came, Xerxes was so captivated by her, that he vowed he would give her half his kingdom, if she asked it. "For what, would she please to say, had she invited him?" "Only that he and Haman should banquet with her the next day also; she would then tell him what she had on her mind."

Delighted at an invitation to dine with the king and queen alone, Haman went home wild with excitement, and boasting of his good fortune. "But," said he, "what is all this to me, while Mordecai the Jew sits there at the king's gate?" "Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high," said Zeresh, his wife, "and hang him on it, and then go merrily to the king's banquet." It seemed a good thought, and Haman ordered the gallows accordingly.

It chanced that Xerxes could not sleep that night, and to while away the hours, commanded that the records of his reign should be brought and read to him. Amongst other incidents, the conspiracy against his life, made known by Mordecai, happened to be repeated, and the question forthwith naturally rose—What had been done to one who had rendered so great a service? It appeared that Mordecai had till then been forgotten. Morning now came; and among others gathered in the outer court waiting an audience, was Haman, bent on obtaining permission to hang Mordecai. Being allowed to enter, Xerxes anticipated his speaking by the question, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?" He intends some new favour to myself, thought Haman, and forthwith replied, "Let a robe of state which the king has himself worn, be brought, and a horse on which the king has ridden, with its royal trappings, especially the head-ornament of a royal crown, which the king's charger

bears, and let one of the highest princes array the king's friend in these robes, and seat him on the horse, and lead him on horseback through the city, proclaiming before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

To his unspeakable horror he was himself instantly ordered to do all this to Mordecai!

Before long the hour came for the banquet, and at it Esther broke her secret to the king, asking him, to his astonishment, that he would spare her life and the life of her people, and denouncing Haman as having inveigled him to pronounce death against both her and them. In his rage Xerxes rose at once and stalked out into the palace garden; but having presently returned, and finding Haman pleading for his life at the side of the queen's couch, his blind fury assumed further crime on the part of the wretched man. A few moments after, and the Amalekite was hanging on the gallows he had erected the day before for Mordecai.

But though the queen was saved, her race was not. Venturing a second time into the king's presence, she obtained a decree empowering them everywhere to resist any violence. This was sent, like the edict for their massacre, everywhere through the empire, and was acted on so vigorously that they at all places became the aggressors, and slew more than 75,000 of their enemies. At Shushan, to make Haman's tragedy complete, his ten sons were, like their father, hanged.

So great an event could not be passed over in the history of a people. From that time the feast of Purim commemorates it each year. The Book of Esther is then read amidst fierce cries of hatred from all present; joyful feasts are held in the illuminated houses of all Jews, and special alms eagerly dispensed.



NEHEMIAH.¹

THE death of King Josiah was the knell of the Jewish Monarchy. His reformation had had the vital defect of resting on force rather than on the convictions and inner life of the people, and had hence been only superficial, and must have been as distasteful to large numbers as the strictness of Puritanism to the generations of the Commonwealth. The master spirit removed, the licence of our Restoration followed. Pharaoh Necho was lord paramount, and treated Judah as a conquered province. The people, using their ancient right, chose Jehoahaz—"sustained by Jehovah"—one of Josiah's sons, as king, but Necho displaced him after three months, in which the unfortunate puppet-monarch showed that he had thrown himself entirely into the hands of the heathen party.

Marching northwards from the battle-field which had made him ruler of Palestine, Necho halted at Riblah on the Orontes, on the caravan road to the Euphrates.

¹ In the ancient Persian sculptures the cup-bearers and immediate attendants on the great king are represented wearing a peculiar head-dress, which entirely muffles the mouth. This was probably to prevent the breath from coming into contact with the royal viands.

Thither he summoned Jehoahaz, and forthwith banished him to Egypt, setting up his brother Eliakim as king, in his stead, at Jerusalem, and imposing a tribute on Judah of a hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold—an amount equivalent to about £3,500—all, doubtless, the impoverished land could pay. Jehoahaz had been chosen by the people as if they were still free: his dethronement and the elevation of his brother showed them that henceforth their rulers were only creatures of Necho.

The very name of Eliakim was changed, and he was recognised as Jehoiakim, as if to show his dependence more thoroughly. His vassal reign continued for eleven years, as he proved himself duly obedient, paying his tribute regularly.

Necho had marched after the battle of Megiddo, by Damascus, to Carchemish on the Euphrates,—the connecting link between Assyria and Syria,—and having taken the fortress, severed the Assyrian territory at one blow. All the country west of the great river thus fell into his hands, and remained subject to him, till Necho, in his turn, was vanquished by the rising power of Babylon.

While Assyria was thus stripped of its western provinces, Nineveh itself had been besieged and taken by the united forces of the Medes and Babylonians, for the time allied with Necho, and thus the Assyrian empire had finally perished.

No sooner was it thus crushed than Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to wrest Necho's share of the spoil from him, which was summarily effected by a second battle at Carchemish, in the year B.C. 605, after Necho had enjoyed his triumph only three or four years.

No longer subject to Egypt, and thinking himself safe from a power so distant as Babylon, Jehoiakim ere long dreamed of independence, and refused to pay any more tribute. A year after Necho's defeat, Nebuchadnezzar himself had come to the throne, but he was too much engaged in the east to trouble himself about Palestine. The puppet king of Judah, however, could hardly maintain himself against the neighbouring populations, and was far enough from regaining independence. He was left however on the throne, and bequeathed his dignity to his son Jehoiachin, but the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar was at last free to bring the nation to a reckoning.

It was about seven years after Necho's defeat when the army of Babylon appeared before Jerusalem, which ere long surrendered. Then came the beginning of the end. The king himself, his mother, his harem, his court, his nobles, and the flower of the army were carried into captivity, the smiths especially being taken away, lest the people should by their means procure arms. The treasures of the Temple rewarded the conqueror. As Jehoiachin had no children, Nebuchadnezzar, willing to rule through the native princes, if possible, set Mattaniah, the third son of Josiah, and uncle of Jehoiachin, on the throne, changing his name to Zedekiah, and for nine years the change seemed to work well. Then, at last, came the catastrophe. Refusal to pay tribute brought the Babylonian army once more to the gates of Jerusalem, which yielded in the spring of the year 588, after a siege of two years. The fury of Nebuchadnezzar at such a resistance was boundless. Zedekiah's sons having been slain before their father's sight, his own eyes were then put out, and he was led in chains to Babylon. The Temple and city were

burned, and the walls were levelled; everything worth taking was carried off, and the bulk of the population swept away to the banks of the Chebar in Mesopotamia.

But the glory of Babylon, like that of all the great Oriental despotisms of antiquity, was short-lived, for a new enemy appeared in the Persians, who, under Cyrus, took even Babylon itself, within fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem (B.C. 538).

The loss of their country, the influence of the prophets who sought constantly to wake them to a higher religious life, and the warnings and exhortations of their holy books, had already waked in the Exiles a deeper interest in the faith of their fathers than had been felt for ages. A large number had grown intensely earnest in their devotion to it, and hence the very first year of the reign of Cyrus saw a request made, that as many as chose might return to their own land and rebuild their ruined capital. They doubtless promised to be an efficient defence of his western frontier, but in the purposes of Providence the whole future of revelation hung on their return. Cyrus, politic and tolerant, at once granted the petition.

Fifty thousand persons of both sexes and all conditions availed themselves of this permission to go back to Palestine—a number small compared with the fainter hearts who remained behind, but sufficient, as it proved, to found the nation once more, in its ancient home. The leadership of these Pilgrim Fathers was given to Joshua, the high priest, and to Zerubbabel, a scion of the family of David, and under their guidance Jerusalem was ere long reached. But jealousy of his origin caused Zerubbabel to be soon recalled; the hatred of the surrounding people threw constant difficulties in the way of restoring the ruined

towns, and the position of the colonists became gradually almost desperate.

Meanwhile the mass of the nation left behind in Persia retained the most lively interest in the welfare of their adventurous brethren. At last, eighty years after the first return, it was determined to send reinforcements to the sorely tried exiles, and a leader was chosen, the scribe Ezra, who was destined to revolutionize Jewish history, as the founder of all that constitutes later Judaism. Carrying with him costly offerings to aid in the re-erection of the Temple, which still lay waste, Ezra had the happiness of reaching Jerusalem safely.

The new leader was pre-eminently a zealot for the Ceremonial Law, which he identified with the interests of religion. He saw that the ruin of the nation had come from the intermixture of heathen customs and ways of thought, and determined to isolate his race, thenceforward, from all others, by insisting on strictly national marriages in every case; by pressing the distinction of clean and unclean food, and by demanding a minute fidelity to ritual and formal observances peculiar to the nation. His success was the creation of the Rabbinical system, which has kept the Jew distinct from all other nations ever since, and has also frozen his religion into an endless repetition of external observances.

Jerusalem was at this time, as it had been since the Persian conquest, under the government of Pashas sent direct from the court at Shushan. Artaxerxes, "the long handed," was then the Persian king, and among his attendants was a Jew, Nehemiah, holding the high office of cupbearer royal, a post of the highest confidence, since it implied responsibility for the monarch's life.

Things had gone worse than ever with the Jews at Jerusalem since Ezra's arrival. He had caused great dissatisfaction by demanding the repudiation of all wives not of Jewish blood. Irregularities of every kind had been rigorously corrected. Men of alien race, but proselytes to the worship of Jehovah, had encroached on the special privileges of Jews and the sanctity of holy places, and were at once required to take a subordinate position. The Samaritans also had been greatly irritated by the harsh refusal of Ezra to enter into friendly religious relations with them, or to recognise them as Jews. The result of all was disastrous. Petty war broke out, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down as fast as they were built, and the community every way imperilled.

Nehemiah heard the sad news with the keenest regret, and determined, if possible, to get permission to cast in his lot with his suffering brethren. It was not till three months had passed, however, that he found an opportunity of making known his wish to Artaxerxes. His sadness attracted the king's attention, and led to his revealing his grief at the miseries of his brethren in Jerusalem, and to his begging that he might be allowed to go thither and build up the town. The king and queen at once granted him leave of absence for a fixed time, which, however, was subsequently extended to at least twelve years. He was commissioned to go as Pasha, under the safe conduct of appointed guards: the Pashas of the districts west of the Euphrates being ordered to aid him in his journey, and the stewards of the woods and forests near Jerusalem commanded to supply him with wood for the building of the city wall, for the city itself, and his own house, and with other necessities.

Nehemiah reached Jerusalem in the beginning of the summer of B.C. 457,¹ and set about his self-appointed task with an energy that guaranteed success. On the third night after his arrival he inspected the state of the walls under the guidance of a small band of attendants, and was able to judge that they could be quickly restored if sufficient vigour were used. An assembly was now summoned of the priests, nobles, leading men, and people, and the permission of the king that the walls should be rebuilt was communicated to them. It was forthwith decided that they should be restored.

The matter could no longer remain secret, and at once raised whispers among the enemies of the Jews, that a revolt was intended. But Nehemiah took no heed of the insinuation, and went steadily on with his work, trusting that God would help him to complete it. The high priest and his brother; the priests, and the people of Jerusalem; Jericho, and other towns round, threw themselves eagerly into the undertaking, and formed separate guilds of workmen to carry on simultaneously the tasks assigned them. A few, however, and they the chief men, stood aloof. As the enemies of Israel saw the work advance, they at first took for granted it would result in nothing lasting, but when unwearied activity had raised the walls to half their height, a plan was concerted to attack the workmen and stop their progress by violence. Nehemiah, however, was warned in time, and defeated the scheme by ordering the builders to go to their places with their weapons as well as tools. Still, there was danger, and the ever watchful chief guarded against it by enrolling in a corps all the men able to bear arms, and making

¹ This may be taken as the date when Herodotus was composing his History, and when Perikles was in his glory.

fresh arrangements to hurry still faster the completion of the walls.

But there were other difficulties besides open hostility. The poor in the community were found to be suffering grievously from the heartlessness of their richer brethren. Summoned to public work on the walls, they could not follow their own callings and care for their households, and since they could not be spared, their grievances demanded redress. The labouring class needed food. Owners of land had pledged their vineyards, fields, and houses to buy wheat. Others had borrowed money on their ground to pay the Persian king's taxes, and even when all had been given up to their creditors, were still said to be in debt, and were on the point of selling their sons and daughters to pay the usury extorted for them ; indeed, some had sold their daughters already.

Nehemiah bitterly reproached the men who had treated their brethren so shamefully, and set before all, in a public assembly, the efforts and sacrifice he had made to redeem their brethren, the Jews sold into slavery to alien races, while some of themselves were treating the poor of the community with such heartlessness that they were being forced to sell their children ! He pleaded with them, therefore, to restore the land of all debtors, and to abandon their claims. Roused by his enthusiasm, all consented, and took an oath to that effect. Nehemiah, as they knew, had waived his privilege, as Pasha, to demand supplies for his personal use from the people, during all the years of his residence in Jerusalem, and had kept open table daily for a hundred and fifty of the poor. With such an example they were shamed into better courses.

The building of the walls now went on rapidly.

Only the gates were wanting. Attempts were made to lure Nehemiah outside, that he might be murdered, but he was too prudent to expose himself. Nor were efforts to poison the mind of the king against him more successful. Conscious of his integrity, he went on steadily with his work, and when it was suggested that he should defend himself before a council of his enemies, he quietly refused. No snare by which he might be caught was unused. It was proposed that he should flee into the holy place for refuge against alleged intended attempts on his life, his enemies knowing that to do so would bring him into collision with the people for sacrilege. But he answered, that as a layman he could not enter such a spot, and thus thwarted the plot against him.

The walls were at last finished in fifty-two days from their commencement, and their completion greatly impressed the numerous enemies of the community. Measures were now taken to bring within the city a population equal to its permanent defence; and this attained, the walls were consecrated with great solemnity. Two choirs started from a fixed point: one, with Ezra at the head of the priests and Levites, going round the northern half of the city, while the other went round the southern half, the two meeting at the Temple, where numerous sacrifices were offered, amidst the loud rejoicings of the people.

Having finished his great task Nehemiah returned to Shushan to the king; but before long he found himself constrained to ask leave to visit Jerusalem once more. During his absence abuses of many kinds had crept in, and there was the utmost need of stricter discipline and restored order. He was no sooner in the holy city once more, as Pasha, than he set himself with a firm hand to introduce all the needed reforms. The high

priest, Eliashib, who should have been a zealous supporter of Ezra and Nehemiah, had disliked the sternness with which Jews were separated from other races, and had given chambers in the Temple to his relation Tobias, one of the old enemies of the Pasha. All that belonged to this offender was at once taken out of the sacred building, and the chambers restored to their former uses, after they had been purified. The Levites and Singers had gone off to their own land, to till it, because the tithes were not paid them; but Nehemiah made arrangements to prevent that in future, and secured them due payment in Jerusalem, that the services of the Temple might not be neglected. The Sabbath had gradually become a market day, but now the most stringent laws were made to prohibit such an abuse. In his zeal, Nehemiah bitterly taunted Jews who had married foreign wives. The grandson of Eliashib, who had married a daughter of Sanballat, and would not divorce her, was made to leave Jerusalem, and absolute isolation was enforced on the whole community, in all points required by the law.

Nehemiah's narrative gives no intimation of the time or place of his death, or of the details of his later life. In the Second Book of Maccabees, however, it is stated that he, first, collected the sacred books of The Kings, The Prophets, and the writings of David, so that we are indebted to him for the first step in the history of the Canon of the Old Testament.

The Jews owed to Nehemiah the preservation of their nationality in a political sense, as they were indebted to Ezra for the religious system which has kept them distinct and imperishable for more than two thousand years. The two were, together, the second founders of the nation.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES

OF JEWISH HISTORY FROM THE DIVISION OF SOLOMON'S KINGDOM, WITH CONTEMPORARY DATES CONNECTED WITH IT. FROM THE LATEST AUTHORITIES.

938. DIVISION OF THE KINGDOMS.

Of course all the years are to be understood as "Before Christ."

<i>Israel.</i>	<i>Judah.</i>
938-917. Jeroboam I. (22 years).	938-922. Rehoboam (17 years).
921. Eighteenth year of Jeroboam's reign.	934. Invasion of Shishak.
919. Twentieth year of Jeroboam's reign.	921-919. Abijah (3 years).
917-916. Nadab (2 years).	919. Asa began to reign.
916-893. Baasha (24 years).	918-878. Asa (41 years).
893-892. Elah (2 years).	917. Asa's second year.
892. Zimri (7 days).	916. Asa's third year.
892-888. Tibni and Omri.	909. Asa's tenth year. The overthrow of Zerah.
888-877. Omri (12 years).	904. Fifteenth year of Asa's reign.
882. Removal of residence to Samaria.	893. Twenty-sixth year of Asa's reign.
878. The eleventh year of Omri's reign.	892. Twenty-seventh year of Asa's reign.
877. Twelfth year of Omri's reign. His death. Ahab ascended the throne. First year of Ahab's reign.	888. Thirty-first year of Asa's reign.
877-856. Ahab's reign of twenty-two years. Elijah.	878. Death of Asa. Jehoshaphat began to reign.
858. Benhadad II. defeated at Aphek.	877-853. Jehoshaphat's reign (25 years).
	858. Twentieth year of Jehoshaphat's reign.

<i>Israel.</i>	<i>Judah.</i>
856. Ahab and Jehoshaphat against Benhadad II. Death of Ahab. First year of Ahaziah.	856. Twenty-second year of Jehoshaphat's reign.
856-855. Ahaziah (2 years).	
855-844. Joram (12 years).	855. Twenty-third year of Jehoshaphat.
	853. Twenty-fifth year of Jehoshaphat.
	852-845. Jehoram (8 years). Elisha.
845. Eleventh year of Joram.	845. Death of Jehoram. Ahaziah ascended the throne.
844. Twelfth year of Joram's reign.	844. Ahaziah (1 year).
843-816. Jehu (28 years).	843-833. Athaliah (6 years)
842. Jehu's tribute to Shalmaneser II. in 18th year of that king's reign, who this year also made war against Hazael of Damascus.	
839. Second war of Shalmaneser against Hazael.	
837. Seventh year of Jehu.	837-798. Jehoash (40 years).
815-799. Jehoahaz (17 years).	815. Twenty-third year of Jehoash.
803. Ramunirari's expedition in his 8th year, to the sea-coast.	
798-783. Jehoash (16 years).	798. Fortieth year of Joash.
797. Second year of Jehoash.	797-769. Amaziah (29 years).
784. War with Amaziah in the 15th year of Jehoash.	784. Fourteenth year of Amaziah.
783-743. Jeroboam II. (41 years).	783. Fifteenth year of Amaziah.
775. Shalmaneser III. in his 7th year marched to Lebanon (the land of cedars).	780-739. Uzziah (42 years).*
769. Fifteenth year of Jeroboam II.'s reign.	780-769. Uzziah the real king, along with Amaziah (12 years).
	768-751. Uzziah reigns alone (18 years).
745. Accession of Tiglath-Pileser II. (Pul of Scripture).	750-739. The co-regency of Jotham (12 years).
743. Zachariah. Shallum.	743. Thirty-eighth year of Uzziah's reign.
*742-738. Menahem (5 years.)	742-40. Uzziah is mentioned in Tiglath-Pileser II.'s inscription.

<i>Israel.</i>	<i>Judah.</i>
738. Menahem pays tribute to Tiglath-Pileser II. in the 8th year of that king.	750-735. Jotham (16 years).
738-737. Pekahiah.	738-735. Jotham reigned alone (4 years).
736-731. Pekah (6 years).	735-715. Ahaz (21 years).
736. Pekah's alliance with Rezin.	734. First year of the reign of Ahaz (post-dated).
735. Beginning of the war of the allied Syrians and Israel against Judah.	732. Ahaz in Damascus.
734. Tiglath-Pileser II.'s march to Palestine in his 12th year, against Pekah.	730. The 4th year of Ahaz.
733-732. Tiglath-Pileser II. marches to Damascus in his 13th and 14th years against Rezin. The taking of Damascus.	
730-722. Hosea (9 years).	
728. His tribute to Tiglath-Pileser II. After 727 this tribute was paid to Shalmaneser IV., who that year ascended the throne.	
724. Beginning of the siege of Samaria.	
722. Accession of Sargon. Taking of Samaria.	722. Twelfth year of reign of Ahaz.

NOTE.—The asterisk at some names indicates a proposed alteration in the common Biblical reckoning, to harmonize it with the undisputed dates before and after.

B.C.

722. Sargon ascended the throne; fall of Samaria 8 years before the death of Ahaz.
721. First year of Sargon.
715. Death of Ahaz. Hezekiah ascends the throne.
714. First year of Hezekiah.
711. Fourth year of Hezekiah. Sargon's Tartan besieges Ashdod.
705. Death of Sargon; Sennacherib ascends the throne.
701. Fourteenth year of Hezekiah; Sennacherib's expedition against Judah.
686. Twenty-ninth year of Hezekiah; his death; Manasseh ascends the throne.
681. Assassination of Sennacherib; Esarhaddon ascended the throne.
643. Death of Manasseh; Amon ascends the throne.

B.C.

- 641. Death of Amon; Josiah begins to reign.
- 640. First year of Josiah.
- 628. Thirteenth year of Josiah. Jeremiah enters on his office.
- 623. Eighteenth year of Josiah. Discovery of the "Book of the Law."
Beginning of Josiah's reformation.
- 610. Thirty-first year of Josiah; battle of Megiddo; death of Josiah.
Jehoahaz begins to reign.
- 609. First year of Jehoiakim.
- 606. Fourth year of Jehoiakim; battle of Carchemish; first year of Nebuchadnezzar, according to Jewish chronology; twentieth year of Nabopolassar.
- 605. Fifth year of Jehoiakim; death of Nabopolassar; Nebuchadnezzar ascends the throne (according to Jer. lii. 28-30).
- 604. Sixth year of Jehoiakim; first year of Nebuchadnezzar, according to official Chaldean reckoning, after the Canon of Ptolemy.
- 599. Eleventh year of Jehoiakim; his death; Jehoiachin led away captive with the flower of Judah (in the eighth, seventh, or sixth year of Nebuchadnezzar.)
- 598. First year of Zedekiah, and of the Exile.
- 595. Zedekiah's journey to Babylon (Jer. li. 59)
- 594. Fifth year of the Exile: Ezekiel enters on his office.
- 589. (In January) beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. (In the 10th month.)
- 588. Eleventh year of Zedekiah, and of the Exile (nineteenth, eighteenth, or seventeenth year of Nebuchadnezzar); destruction of Jerusalem. (In the 5th month.)
- 572. Twenty-seventh year of the Exile; last date of the prophecies of Ezekiel (Ezekiel xxix. 17).
- 562. Thirty-seventh year of the Exile (forty-fifth or forty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar); death of Nebuchadnezzar; Evil-Merodach ascends the throne.
- 561. (Beginning of April.) (25th or 27th of the month Adar;) pardon of Jehoiakim; first year of Evil-Merodach began some days later.
- 560. Second year of Evil-Merodach; his death. Pisistratus in Athens.
- 559-555. Nergal Sharezer.
- 558. Cyrus conquers Media. Cræsus reigns in Lydia.
- 555. Laborosoarchod.
- 555-538. Nabonidus.
- 545. Cræsus overthrown by Cyrus.
- 538. Cyrus occupies Babylon. RETURN of the Jews from Babylon.
- 537. Rebuilding of the Temple commenced.
- 531. First year of Cambyses.
- 526. Beginning of the Persian dynasty in Egypt.
- 522. First year of Darius, son of Hystaspis.
- 521. Temple finished, overthrow of the KINGS at Rome.
- 478. Eclipse of the Sun (Eclipse of Xerxes). ESTHER lives at Shushan.
- 473. Eclipse of the Sun (Battle of Plataea).

B.C.

- 466. First year of Artaxerxes the Long-handed.
- 460. EZRA made governor of Judah.
- 457. NEHEMIAH made Pasha of Judah. MALACHI.
- 336. Alexander the Great visits Jerusalem.
- 331. Battle of Arbela.
- 324. Alexander the Great dies.
- 305. Ptolemy, son of Lagos, takes Jerusalem on the Sabbath.
- 170. Antiochus Epiphanes takes Jerusalem and desecrates it.
- 143. Simon Maccabeus becomes Ethnarch of the Jews after the victory won by his sons.
- 114. Hyrcanus I. reigns.
- 63. Pompey takes Jerusalem.
- 44. Julius Cæsar murdered.
- 40. HEROD made King by the Roman Senate.
- 4. Herod the Great died.

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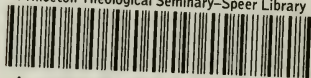
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